





SCC
8284

✓✓ Miscellaneous Pamphlets

vol. 21.







THE DEACON:

AN INQUIRY INTO



THE NATURE, DUTIES, AND EXERCISE

OF THE

OFFICE OF THE DEACON,

IN THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

BY

✓
JAMES M. WILLSON, A. M.,

PASTOR OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION, PHILA.

"Let the Deacons be grave, &c."—1 TIM. iii. 8.
"Let all things be done decently, and in order."—1 COR. xiv. 40.

PHILADELPHIA:

WILLIAM S. YOUNG, 173 RACE STREET.

.....

1841.

INTRODUCTION.

THIS Essay has for its object the illustration of a part of the Order of the Church of God, which has, in modern times, been remarkably overlooked. The office of the *deacon* is not, it is true, so important as either that of the pastor or the ruling-elder, yet it is not without its importance as a distinct part of the Building of God. The care of the church's poor, and the wise and faithful administration of the contributions of the saints for the promotion of Christ's cause, are matters that cannot, without injury to the church, be forgotten or neglected: and it is worth our serious inquiry, whether the manifest deficiency in the first of these, and the almost insuperable difficulties that often beset the church in regard to the last, may not be in part owing to the want of the deaconship as an actively executed function in the churches. For two other reasons, however, this subject should engage the most careful and solemn attention of the members of the Christian church. 1st. If the *deacon's* office be, as it is generally admitted to be, a divinely instituted office, can the churches be guiltless in the neglect of it? And, 2dly, most of the churches explicitly recognise this office in their standards as of divine right, but how few have such an officer as the *deacon*! It should, at least, awaken the attention of Christians to the subject, when they look into the Scriptures, and find the *deacon* often mentioned there—when they look into the standards of their churches, and find the *deacon* recognised there, but when they look round upon their congregations they can find *no deacons*, or very few, there. That we may know Christ's will as King in Zion, and pay our own vows, we ought to ex-

amine this subject honestly and prayerfully; and not only examine but act, by restoring this office to its original and proper position in the Christian Church.

Such an examination has been attempted in the following Essay. The general, and yet not concerted action, in reference to the deacon's office, which has taken place and is now going on, in many churches in Scotland and Ireland, and in the United States, seems to indicate a providential movement, and to invite such an examination. Let not the reader reject at once propositions that may be new to him. Weigh the evidence.

Much obscurity may be expected to prevail upon a subject that has occupied so little attention for some generations, until a very late period. The writer is, in some respects, a pioneer on this subject. Dr. MILLER, of Princeton, has, indeed, discussed the office of the deacon in his Essay upon the Ruling-Elder, with his usual accuracy and research. It will be found, however, that this Essay embraces a larger field, and one which has for some time past been little cultivated. Owing to this circumstance, there may be some inaccuracies which might otherwise have been avoided; and that, notwithstanding much care has been taken to avoid the mis-stating either of facts or principles. Let the attention of the churches be directed to the subject in a proper spirit, and with an humble dependence upon the Spirit of Christ, for teaching and direction, and then mistakes will in due time be rectified—errors removed, and the truth not only discovered, but reduced to practice. To furnish some assistance in bringing about these results, is the object of the following Essay.

Philadelphia.

THE DEACON.

CHAPTER I.

The Deacon's Office is ordinary and perpetual in the Christian Church.

DEACONS were ordained in the apostolic churches soon after the day of Pentecost. Of the election and ordination of seven deacons in the church at Jerusalem, we have the history in Acts vi. 1—6. When the epistle to the Philippians was written, there was a class of officers in the churches in Philippi, distinct from Bishops, and called *deacons*: for this epistle is addressed “to the saints, with the bishops and *deacons*.” They are mentioned in 1 Tim. iii. 8, 12, 13, as standing officers of the church. This epistle contains directions for the right ordering of the house of God. Among the things to be set in order are the “bishops” and the “*deacons*,” ver. 8, “*Likewise must the deacons be grave.*” The manner in which the deacons are referred to here, in a letter of instructions to an evangelist, whose duty it was to set in order in the churches the things that were wanting, is almost, if not altogether, equivalent to a command to all congregations to choose them and have them ordained. They must have been a known and established class of ecclesiastical officers at that time; as much so as “bishops;” for they are mentioned exactly in the same way. There are plain allusions to this office, as an established function in the church, in other epistles. In Rom. xii. 6, 7, Paul exhorts the deacon, with the other ecclesiastical officers: “having, then, gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith: or ministry, (*διακονίαν, the deaconship*) let us wait on our ministering, (*ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ, on the deaconship.*) Besides, the duties of the deacon are unequivocally referred to, in the eighth verse, in the expressions, “giving,” and, “showing mercy.”* There can be no reasonable

* Henry, “ministry”—*the office of a deacon.* Scott, “*if a man were called to the office of a deacon.*” Guyse, “*or if any of us be called*

doubt, that, at this time, there was in the Roman church, as at Philippi, a board of deacons, whose official business it was, to distribute of the church's stock to the necessities of the poor, and for other demands.

The same apostle, in 1 Cor. xii. 28, enumerates *deacons*, with the other officers "set in the church," under the denomination of "helps," for they were originally instituted, as we learn from the account of the choice of the first deacons, in Acts vi., to be *helps*, or *assistants* to the apostles in the work of distributing the church's stock.* The deacon's office is mentioned by the apostle Peter, as established, and exercised in the churches of Asia Minor: 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11, "as every man hath received the gift, (*χαρισμα*, the office,†) even so minister the same to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, (*διακονει*, *exercises the deacon's office*,) let him do it as of the ability which God giveth (*χορηγει* *furnisheth*.)" The last clause fixes the meaning of the word, "minister," and shows that it is used in a restricted sense, that it is the deacon who is exhorted to liberality to the full extent of the supply furnished him in the providence of God.‡ The Christians immediately addressed in this letter were dispersed throughout a large district of country on the west of Asia. The deacon must have been known as a church officer throughout that region.

to the office of deacons." Calvin, "he that giveth," "*deacons who preside in distributing the public property of the church.*" Hodge, "*those who were called to the office of deacons.*" Rutherford, "*the distributor is the deacon also.*" Beza, "*the bodily ministrations of the church.*" London Divines, Paisley Ed. 1799, p. 105, "*he that giveth*, that is, the deacon," p. 140, "so they are distinguished from all ordinary officers, reckoned up, Rom. xii. 7, 8." Renwick's work quoted in the next note, p. 541, "him that sheweth mercy, by whom is meant the deacon."

* Henry, "*helps: or such as had compassion on the sick and weak, and ministered to them.*" Scott, "*or, as some explain it, to help the pastors in the office of deacons.*" London Divines, same Ed. p. 116, "*helps*, there is the deacon;" p. 140, "deacons in the church are an ordinance of Jesus Christ. For, 1. They are found in Christ's catalogue of church officers, distinct from all other officers, both extraordinary and ordinary, *helps*, 1 Cor. xii. 28." James Renwick's Admission of Elders, p. 562, of collection of sermons, Glasgow, 1776, "*helps*, that is, the deacons." The same interpretation is given of this passage, by Beza, Piscator, Dickson, Hammond, and many other critics.

† As in 1 Tim. iv. 14, and 2 Tim. i. 6.

‡ Scott, "*and if any man acted as a deacon.*" Henry, "*either as a deacon distributing the alms of the church.*" Grotius, "*the duty of deacons.*" So Piscator and Calvin.

In all the passages quoted, the word “διακονος” is used as a designation of office. It is not, however, always thus employed; it sometimes signifies one who “serves” in any employment, or performs any “act of ministration.” As in 2 Cor. iii. 6, Paul styles himself and Apollos, “διακονους.” And in Rom. xv. 8, our Saviour himself is said to be “the minister (διακονον) of the circumcision.” In this respect, διακονος, corresponds with other words designating office-bearers. Αποστολος signifies “a messenger;” and is so used, Phil. ii. 25, where Epaphroditus is called “your messenger, υμων αποστολον.” Yet the “apostles” were extraordinary ecclesiastical officers. Πρεσβυτερος means “one elder in years;” and is used in that sense, 1 Tim. v. 1. But it is also an official designation. When Paul addresses “the deacons” at Philippi, there is no difficulty in distinguishing the specific sense of the word “διακονους.” It is equally plain, that in 1 Tim. iii., “the deacon” is an officer of the church, distinct from the bishop or presbyter. When he that ministereth, is mentioned in Rom. xii., and 1 Pet. iv., as one who performs duties entirely different in their character from those of the exhorter, and the speaker, and these duties are “giving,” and “showing mercy,” we at once discover a distinct office—the diakonate. In a word, a process of reasoning precisely similar to that which would resolve the deacon’s office into a *service of any kind*, would strip the church of all her officers, ordinary and extraordinary.*

Some, admitting the deacon’s office to be distinct from that of the pastor and ruling elder, have supposed it, however, to be, after all, a mere expedient; that it is left to the will of the church to determine whether there shall be deacons ordained or not. It is supposed that the fact of the circumstances which gave rise to the appointment of “the seven,” being mentioned in the narrative of that event, (Acts vi. 1—6,) warrants such an inference.

It might be argued, as plausibly, that the Jewish Sanhedrim was not a permanent institution, because it originated in the wilderness, by the advice of Jethro, and was established for the purpose of relieving Moses from a burden too heavy for him. Or that the organization of the Christian Church, by a regular gradation of courts from the session to the General Synod (or Assembly,) and the bringing up of appeals from the lower to the higher, are

* It would go farther, and abolish the *presidents, judges, &c.*, of the state; the *generals* of the army; and most other officers, for their titles have a general and common, as well as a specific and technical meaning.

indifferent, or to be determined by circumstances, because the Synod at Jerusalem was held twenty years after the day of Pentecost, and was then held for a special business. The objection omits entirely some very important considerations. 1. We must "distinguish between an occasion, and a motive and cause."* The *occasion* of instituting the Sanhedrim was the pressure of judicial business upon Moses: the *motive* was the establishment of such a system as might *always secure* due attention to legislative and judicial business. Israel was not to wait until a recurrence of similar circumstances before electing their rulers: by electing them agreeably to God's appointment, they were prepared for business beforehand. 2. We are to receive from the Scriptures the order of the church in its completed form. Otherwise, the church might always be said to be in an inchoate or forming state. Ruling elders might be dropped for the very reason which is involved in the objection, because some time must have elapsed before their ordination after the day of Pentecost: even the pastoral office, for the same reason! The apostles were commissioned to erect the fabric of the church in her New Testament form. Are we at liberty to say, "this fabric was at a certain period incomplete; an uncommon concurrence of circumstances gave rise to a part of her form, therefore, this is not called for in any other circumstances?" Is not the *perfect* fabric, on the contrary, the model to which the church's structure should be conformed? Moreover, it is probable that a *very* short time elapsed previously to the ordination of deacons: *perhaps not a month*. 3. In the other passages where the deacon is mentioned, there is no intimation of any such principle applicable to the deacon's office. It is referred to as a standing and permanent office. And 4. The objection comes to us liable to great suspicion, for it is brought forward by those who have neglected to ordain this scriptural officer, as an apology for this neglect. And, finally, the assumption that there is not a call for this office under ordinary circumstances, is entirely unfounded. For these reasons we do not admit the objection as having any force. And in this we follow the example of the church of God in all her purest and best times.

The epistles in which the notices of the deacon's office which have been referred to, occur, were sent to parts of the church very distant from each other; indeed, it may be truly said, to all the apostolic churches. Rome, on the

* Due Right of Presbyteries, by Samuel Rutherford, p. 160.

far west—the Asiatic churches, addressed by Peter, on the east, and the Grecian churches lying between them. In all these, the deacon was a recognised and *existing* officer in the times of the apostles themselves, and by their direction.*

With regard to the existence of deacons as distinct officers in the church, from the apostolic age onward, there is, and can be, no doubt. Mosheim says,† that “all the other christian churches followed the example of that of Jerusalem, in whatever related to the choice and office of the deacons.” In the apostolical canons,‡ the deacon is constantly mentioned in connexion with bishops and elders. These canons are not, it is true, as their title would intimate, the production of the apostles, but they do, nevertheless, establish with great certainty the order existing in the church during the 2d and 3d centuries, or perhaps a little later. The epistles of Ignatius,§ who lived at the close of the first century, and the beginning of the second, are enough, even if we had no other evidence, to establish the fact of the presence, *universally*, of deacons in the churches before the death of the last of the apostles. He says to the Magnesians, “I exhort you that you study to do all things in a divine concord—and *your deacons, most dear to me, being intrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ.*” Again, to the Trallians; “*Let all reverence the deacons.*” Again, to the Philadelphians; “which also I salute, &c.—especially if they are at unity with the bishop and elders, who are with him, *and the deacons appointed according to the mind of Jesus Christ.*” Again, “one bishop, together with his eldership, *and the deacons, my fellow-servants.*” Again, “I speak with a loud voice; attend to the bishop, to the eldership, *and to the deacons.*” Again, to the Smyrneans; “*and reverence the deacons as the command of God.*” Again, “I salute your very worthy bishop; and your venerable eldership; *and your deacons, my fellow-ser-*

* Dr. Owen, the distinguished English divine, remarks in the ix. chapter of his *Treatise on Church Government*, that “deacons were not only in the church at Jerusalem, but in *all* the churches of the Gentiles.”

† Ecclesiastical History, Cent. I. chapter 2, § 10.

‡ These canons, although not composed by the apostles, nor even in their times, are unquestionably the production of a very early age. A few quotations will confirm the statement in the text. Canon 27th, “Episcopum, vel Presbyterum, vel *diaconum* verberantem fideles peccantes, &c.” Can. 42d, “Episcopus, aut Presbyter, aut *diaconus*, alea vacuus, &c.” Can. 44th “Episcopus, aut Presbyter, aut *diaconus* usuras exigens, &c.”

§ Ignatius was martyred during the reign of Trajan; of course, before A. D. 117.

vants." And, finally, in his epistle to Polycarp;* "My soul be security for them who submit to their bishop,† with their elders and *deacons*." Origen,‡ who lived in the beginning of the third century, a little more than one hundred years after the death of the apostle John, speaks of deacons as officers then in the church. "*The deacons*," says he, "*preside over the money tables of the church*." Cyprian, the distinguished bishop of Carthage, who was martyred in the year 259, directs his 29th epistle "*to my brethren, the elders and deacons*." Epiphanius, a writer of the fourth century, says, "originally all offices of the church were performed by bishops, presbyters, and *deacons*, and, therefore, no church was without a deacon."

These citations bring us to the Nicene period. They furnish ample evidence that from the earliest periods the church had deacons, to assist the pastors and eldership in the right ordering of ecclesiastical affairs. Indeed, to those who are at all familiar with the history of the first three centuries of the Christian era, even these brief statements on the subject may have seemed unnecessary. The deacon is mentioned by all the early writers who have occasion to refer to the organization of the church, as freely, and almost as frequently as the pastor, or the ruling elder. Any one who has read the letters and commentaries of the fathers, (as they are called,) knows this to be so. Let us come down to a later period.

The witnesses, who continued to keep the truth, and testified for it in the valleys of Savoy and Piedmont, while the corruptions of popery and the delusions of Mahomedanism were quenching its light over the whole of the old Roman Empire, had their congregations organized with deacons. Their Confession of Faith, inserted in the "addition" to the history of the Waldenses by M. Gillis, one of their pastors, makes the following declaration on this subject; "It is *necessary* for the church to have pastors, to preach God's word, to administer sacraments, and to watch over the sheep of Jesus Christ; and also elders and *deacons*, according to the rules of good and holy church discipline, and the *practice of the primitive church*." This confession is said by the historian to have been the con-

* Martyred in the reign of Marcus Antoninus, Trajan's successor.

† The reader should understand that these early writers did not use the word "bishop" in the sense of "diocesan bishop," they meant the bishop of a congregation. See Mosheim, 1st Century.

‡ One of the most intelligent of all the early writers, though in many things unsound. He died about the middle of Century III.

fession of the ancient Waldensian church, and still received.*

The Reformers in the 16th century, both upon the continent and in the British Isles, who organized their churches upon Presbyterian principles, *all* had deacons in their congregations; they *all* held the doctrine that the deacon's office is ordinary and perpetual: and here the only labour is to select from the mass of testimony presented, that which is most brief and forcible. Let us begin with Geneva and Calvin. In his 24th sermon, on the 1st Epistle to Timothy, Calvin says, "and it is certain that God will have this rule to be observed and *kept* in his church; that is to say, that the poor be cared for; and not only that every private man, &c.; but that there be a public office, and men appointed to have care of them that are in necessity, that things may be ordered as they ought." What follows is expressed in strong language, and shows what this eminent divine thought of the omission to ordain deacons. "*And, if it be not so, it is certain, that we cannot brag that we have a well ordered church, and after the doctrine of the gospel, but a confused thing and a hotch-potch.*"

Francis Junius, who was Professor of Theology in the church of Holland in the beginning of the reformation, maintains in his "Ecclesiastics," that "pastors, elders, and *deacons*, are the only three scriptural orders of church officers;" that "these *three orders are set forth in scripture, and existed in the primitive church.*" Pareus, a German reformer of great eminence, who lived at the same time, in his commentary on Romans xii. 8, explains the "giving," and "showing mercy," as "standing *ecclesiastical deaconships*," or functions of the deacon's office. Jerome Zanchius, an Italian divine of the 16th century, and a very distinguished reformer, says, "The whole ministry of the Christian church may be divided into three classes.—The third is of those to whom is committed the care of the poor, &c., who were called *deacons*, Acts vi., Romans xii., 1st Timothy iii."†

The sentiments of these very distinguished continental divines, were in strict accordance with the doctrines on the subject of the deacon's office, imbodyed in the standards of nearly all the reformed churches upon the continent. The Geneva book of common order, chapter iii., says, "The *deacons* must be men of good estimation, &c."

* This statement is taken from "Miller on the Ruling Elder," p. 109.

† Zanchii Opera, Vol. iv. 4th præcept, p. 727.

This book of common order contains the rules of discipline adopted by the Scottish congregation of Geneva, and agrees, in all important particulars, with the discipline of the churches of Geneva. The French church was very explicit. Confession of Faith, Art. xxix.: "we believe that this true church ought to be governed by that discipline which our Lord Jesus hath established; so that there should *be in the church* pastors, elders, and *deacons*."* That the French churches had deacons in all their congregations is a fact so notorious as to require no proof. They went farther, however, and required of noblemen "to constitute in their families a consistory, composed of the minister, and of the best approved persons for godliness in their said family, who shall be chosen elders and *deacons*."†

The principles of Knox and his co-labourers, and successors in the work of reformation in Scotland in reference to the deacon, are most readily ascertained, and with the greatest certainty from the 1st and 2d books of discipline, of the Scottish church.‡ In that church there was never any

* Quick's Synodicon, Vol. I. London, 1690.

† French Church Discipline. Sect. xii., Chapter I., Can. xxi. The "Confession" of the French churches was drawn up in 1559. Their discipline was subjected to revision in twenty-three synods, and finally passed about 1575.

‡ A brief history of these documents may not be unacceptable to the reader. They are commonly referred to by the title, "Books of Policy." The 1st book was compiled by John Knox, upon the basis of the Geneva "Book of Common Order," and was adopted by the church of Scotland, A. D. 1561. It never became the law of the land, the Parliament being unwilling to sanction its principles on the subject of the property of the church, and the deacon's office. The 2d book was an improvement, in some respects, upon the first. It was finally adopted by the General Assembly in 1578, having been carefully prepared by a committee appointed for that purpose, of which Andrew Melville was a member. The Parliament, however, refused to ratify the 2d Book of Discipline, until 1592. In that year they passed, though not without a great deal of opposition, the principal parts and, among them, those most obnoxious to the court party. McCrie has the following foot note in reference to this event, in his "Life of Andrew Melville, page 235, Oxford (Ohio) edition. "The heads of *patronage, divorce, and the office of deacons*, were the most offensive to the court, and consequently, were made the subject of longest discussion. *The ground of objection to the last of these heads was, that it gave the management of the patrimony of the church to the deacons.*" The last remark is worth remembering; for it shows that the principles of the Scottish church, on the subject to which it refers, were adopted deliberately, after careful examination, and long and elaborate discussion; by such men, too, as Andrew Melville. It is entitled, "The Second Book of Discipline, or Heads and Conclusions of the Policy of the Kirk; agreed upon in the General Assembly 1578; inserted in the registers of assembly 1581; sworn to in the National Covenant; revived and ratified by the assembly 1638, and by many other acts of

diversity of opinion on the subject; the perpetuity of the deacon's office was maintained as fully and as plainly as of the pastoral office, or that of the ruling elder. First Book of Discipline, chapter vii.: "men of the best knowledge, judgment, and conversation, *should be* chosen for elders and *deacons*. Their election shall be yearly, where it may be conveniently observed."* Second Book of Discipline, chapter ii.: "Again, the whole policy of the kirk consisteth in three things, namely, in doctrine, discipline and distribution: with doctrine is annexed the administration of sacraments; and, according to the parts of this division, ariseth a threefold sort of officers in the kirk, *to wit*, of ministers or preachers, elders or governors, and *deacons* or *distributors*; and all these may be called by a general word, ministers of the kirk." Again, in the same chapter; "In the New Testament, and time of the Evangel, he hath used the ministry of the Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and doctors, in administration of the word; the eldership for good order, and administration of discipline; *the deaconship* to have the care of the *ecclesiastical* goods. Some of these ecclesiastical functions are ordinary, and some extraordinary, or temporary. Here are four ordinary functions or officers in the kirk of God; the office of the pastor, minister or bishop; the doctor, the presbyter, or elder, *and the deacon*. These offices are ordinary, *and ought to continue perpetually in the kirk*, as necessary for the government and policy thereof: and no more officers ought to be received or suffered in the true kirk of God, established according to his word."

These doctrines were no dead letter in that church, and in the hands of Knox and Melville. They ordained deacons in all their organized congregations. The first reformed congregation in Scotland, was organized in Edinburgh in the year 1556, or 7, by the election and ordination of elders and *deacons*.† M'Crie, in his Life of Knox,‡

assembly: and according to which, the church government is established by law. Anno 1592, and 1640."

* This arrangement, (the yearly election of elders and deacons,) was rejected as unscriptural in the 2d Book of Discipline; and with evident propriety, as there is no intimation in any part of scripture that offices can be vacated in this way by a system of rotation. This plan has been all along retained by the Holland churches; and is, unquestionably, a chief cause of that imbecility of the ecclesiastical government which enabled the state to despoil the church of many of her privileges.

† M'Crie's Life of Knox, Oxford edition, page 65. In a note on page 95, he states that "the number of elders in the session of Edinburgh, in 1560, was twelve, and of *deacons* sixteen."

‡ Same edition, page 87.

says, that after the establishment of protestantism, and the adoption of the 1st Book of Policy, in the year 1560, "the affairs of each congregation were managed by the minister, elders, and *deacons*, who constituted the *kirk session*, which met regularly once a week, and oftener if business required." In the same work, page 126, there is a circumstance related which proves that, until Knox's death, in 1572, this order was observed in the church in Edinburgh. A few days before his death, this great reformer was very anxious to meet once more with the session of his church—his colleague, the elders, and *deacons*, assembled in his room, &c." The same excellent historian states, in his Life of Andrew Melville,* that "the town and parish of St. Andrews † was divided into districts, and over each of these a certain number of elders and *deacons* were appointed as inspectors and visiters." In a note to this work (G G) there is an extract in the following words, from the sessional records of Glasgow: "November 14, 1583, the session appoint an inquest to be taken of men who are neither elders nor deacons for this year, out of several parts of the town." And another, of the sessional records of St. Andrews, March 2, 1596, containing a minute of a meeting of session, "appointed to try the life and conversation of the whole members of the session, as well ministers as elders and *deacons*." These facts are enough to establish the practice of the Scottish church; and they show, conclusively, that her practice accorded with her principles. The first reformed congregation in that kingdom had *deacons* in 1556, and from that time until she reached the highest point of that reformation, to which she attained in the 16th century, *deacons* were never wanting in the Scottish churches.

That the doctrines and practice of this church during the second reformation, from 1638 to 1649, were the same with those of Knox and Melville, can be very readily shown. The 2nd Book of Discipline was revived and ratified by the assembly 1638. Its doctrines in regard to deacons which we have already quoted, were, of course received as the declared principles of the Scottish Church at that time. In the year 1645 the form of church government, compiled by the Westminster Assembly of Divines, was adopted. This document is remarkably explicit on the subject of the perpetuity of the *deacon's* office.

* Same edition, page 278.

† Melville was rector of the University of St. Andrews, after his return in 1574 from France.

Deacons are mentioned among the “ordinary and perpetual officers of the church.” They are said to be “distinct officers in the church, whose office is *perpetual*.” Again, “It is *requisite* that there be others, (officers of a particular congregation,) to take special care for the relief of the poor.” It should be observed, that the same phraseology is used with regard to the ruling elder; “It is *requisite* that there be some to join in government;”* plainly showing that they considered *deacons* to be as requisite as *ruling elders*.

As has been remarked respecting the opinions of the Scottish Reformers of the preceding century, these sentiments were carefully and deliberately formed. Many volumes were published during this period on the government of the Church. In these we find elaborate discussions on the office of the deacon. All advocate the doctrines of the Book of Policy. Among these, Samuel Rutherford’s† elaborate work, entitled, “The Due Right of Presbyteries,” is distinguished for ability and research. In this volume he takes up and answers *fourteen* objections to the office of the *deacon*; *eight* of these respect it as *ordinary* and *perpetual*. To do his argument justice, it would be necessary to quote very largely. A few extracts must suffice. He replies to the objection, that “circumstances gave rise to the institution of this office, and that, consequently, it is not permanent,” as follows: “The occasion of the multiplying of disciples, and the neglecting of the widows, *doth not prove that deacons are a prudential and temporary institution*; for here I distinguish between an occasion, and a motive and cause: divers ordinances of God have both these.” Again, he answers the objection which is so often brought forward now, that deacons are not necessary, “because their duties can be, and are, performed by other ecclesiastical officers,” in the following terms: “I cannot well deny, but it is apparent from Acts vi. 4, that the apostles themselves were once those who cared for the poor; but I deny that hence it follows in the case of fewer poor, that the office can return to the pastor as to the first subject,‡ except you suppose the intervention

* Confession of Faith, Edinb. Ed. 1836; and Philad. Ed. 1838, p. 574.

† Professor of Divinity at St. Andrews. This volume was published in London, 1644: we quote from pages 160, 163.

‡ “As to the *first subject*.” Rutherford does not deny that it is the duty of the “pastor to take care of the poor,” for to this part of the form of church government he gave his assent. By “*the first subject*” of office power, he means those whose *special duty it is to perform any official function*: as the ruling elder rules as his *special charge*, the pas-

of a divine institution to place it again in the pastors—and considering the afflictions of the churches, the object of the *deacons* ‘giving’ and ‘showing mercy,’ as it is Rom. xii. 8, cannot be wanting, *as that the Church’s fabric be kept in good frame,** the poor, the captives of Christian churches, &c., be relieved.”

To multiply quotations, when those already made, though few, are so explicit and full, would be burdensome. It remains only to show that these principles were reduced to practice. This might be inferred, indeed, from the character of the Scottish church at that brightest period of her reformation. However, there is direct and ample testimony that, during the second reformation, the church of Scotland had deacons in *all* her congregations. This we find in the laws enacted during that period: the most certain kind of historical evidence. The following clause of the law respecting the election of ruling elders was passed, as its date shows, in 1642, “and the fittest and most experienced of them (heads of families) may be supposed to be among the *deacons*. Act of Ass. Aug. 1st, 1642.”† Could such a clause have been inserted in a law, if there had been no deacons in their congregations? Again, in the law regulating the meetings of the Kirk-Session, is the following clause: “The deacons are *always* present, not for discipline, but for what relates to their own office. Act of Ass., Aug. 10th, 1648.”‡ Could the presence of the deacons at all the meetings of Session have been stated by the General Assembly, both as a *fact*, and as a part of their ecclesiastical order, unless there had been such officers in the church, and well known too? Again, in the year 1645, “the elders and *deacons* in landward parishes were authorized (by parliament) to name collectors of the excise.”§ Certainly an act hard to account for, and explain, had there been no deacons at that time in the parishes of the Scottish Church!

The attainments of this church in regard to her go-

tor ministers at the altar, as his *special* work. Yet the pastor rules. The pastor and elders “take care of the poor;” not as the “first subjects” of this official duty, but as intrusted with the whole oversight of the affairs of the house of God. To perform this duty, there must be *deacons* who are the “first subjects” of it, then the pastor and elders act with them, as the pastor rules, not alone, but with elders ordained to that *special* charge.

* Rutherford does not restrict this office to the care of the poor only.

† Stewart’s Coll., Book I., Tit. vii., Sect. 2.

‡ Do. Book I., Tit. xi., Sect. 2.

§ Stevenson’s History of the Church and State of Scotland, Edin. 1753. p. 1129.

vernment and order, were retained with fidelity; cherished with affection; and, as far as their trying circumstances admitted, carefully and conscientiously applied, by the covenanters, long after the mad and cruel policy of Charles II., and the violence of persecution, had broken down the carved work of the sanctuary in those lands. Renwick and his suffering brethren declare most solemnly, in the very darkest hour of Scotland's night of persecution, their steadfast adherence to "the ordinary and perpetual officers of the church by Christ's own appointment; such as pastors, doctors, elders, and *deacons*."* This profession was renewed by the scattered societies of Covenanters, in their declaration emitted at Sanquahar in 1692.† Renwick writes to Sir Robert Hamilton, in the year 1685, or 6, that he "was about to ordain some more elders and some *deacons*."‡

The reformation attained its greatest height in Scotland. Whatever refers to the government of the church, as well as to doctrine and worship, was better known and more generally practised in Scotland than in England. A brief notice of the southern portion of the British isles, in connexion with the subject of the deacon's office, will, therefore, suffice. It is well known that the reformation in the 16th century, brought about through the instrumentality of Henry VIII., was lamentably imperfect. However, many of the ministry and members of the English establishment looked, with a favourable eye, from the first, upon the endeavours of their brethren in other countries, particularly in Scotland, after a more scriptural and thorough reformation. As early as the reign of Edward VI. § some foreigners who had taken refuge in that country from troubles on account of religion in their own, formed themselves into congregations, organized chiefly according to the Presbyterian model. || M'Crie says, ¶ that "the affairs of each congregation were managed by a minister, ruling elders, and *deacons*; and each of these offices was considered as of divine institution." Cranmer, and other eminent Englishmen, treated them with great kindness,

* In the year 1687. See *Informatory Vindication*, N. Y. Ed., 1834, p. 197.

† Do. p. 318.

‡ Renwick's *Letters*, Let. LII. p. 184, Edin. 1714. See Note A. for some observations on the dropping of the deacon's office in the Scottish church.

§ He reigned from 1547 to 1553.

|| They had superintendents: in this they departed from strict Presbyterianism.

¶ Note xviii. to the *Life of Knox*.

and were well inclined to their form of government. Nothing was accomplished towards a better reformation until the following century. In the year 1616 the Independents formed their first congregation by the "ordination of ruling elders and deacons."* The opinions of the Independents of that century are expressed by the very celebrated Dr. Owen,† in his treatise on Church Government. He says, speaking of Acts vi. 1—6, "it was *the institution of a new office*, and not a present supply in a work or business, which they designed." And again; "Nor was this a temporary institution for that season, and so the officers appointed extraordinary; *but was to abide in the church throughout all generations.*" He speaks of the deacon, in the same connexion, as a known and existing officer, remarking, that "the original institution, nature, and use of the office of *deacons* in the church *were so well known*" that it "was not necessary to insist much on them."

At a later period, when the principles of the Scottish reformation had taken root in England, the views of the English reformers upon the deacon's office, are very decidedly expressed in that form of church government compiled by the Westminster Assembly, from which quotations have already been made.‡ These views were ably advocated by several divines of Zion's College, London, in a work entitled "The Divine Right of Church Government." In this essay they say§ that "deacons are *ordinary officers* in the church of God, *of which she will have constant use in all ages*, and which, at first, were divinely appointed, and after, frequently mentioned in the New Testament."

This brings to a close our historical review of the purer periods of the Reformed Churches. Many of the descendants of the British reformers have dropped the office of deacon, although they still retain, in their published creeds and confessions, the principles of the scriptures, and of their fa-

* Neal's Hist. of the Puritans, Vol. I. p. 462.

† Owen was not a Congregationalist, as that appellation is now understood. He was much nearer to Presbyterianism in his sentiments on church government, than any other form subsisting in our times.

‡ Page 15.

§ P. 140. This work was written by these eminent divines in the year 1645, during the sessions of the Westminster Assembly, to defend the Presbyterian principles of the English Covenanters against the Erastians and Independents, who were making very decided opposition to their introduction into that kingdom. It contains, perhaps, the most complete defence of the Divine Right of Presbyterianism ever issued.

thers, in reference to this office. In France and Holland they still have *deacons*: they have never ceased to have them since the reformation. The Scottish establishment, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, both in Britain and America; the Presbyterian Synod of Ulster, in Ireland; the Associate Presbyterian Church; the Associate Reformed and the General Assembly Presbyterian Church, in the United States, and some other denominations, still retain in their standards the *substance*, and most of them, *the very language* of the Westminster divines on this subject. Of course, all these bodies, how different soever their practice, *profess* to believe, as their fathers in the time of the Reformation did, that "the deacon's office is ordinary and perpetual." And, although these denominations have dropped in part, or altogether, this office, we yet find writers of eminence expressing themselves with great explicitness on the subject. The language of John Brown of Haddington is peculiarly strong and decided. He says,* "There is no hint in scripture that the offices of ruling elder and deacon were designed to be temporary—*no congregation can, therefore, answer to Jesus Christ for the dropping of DEACONS, any more than for the dropping of ruling elders.*" Similar sentiments are found in other authors. Indeed, almost without exception, those who have noticed the subject at all, (and they are not few,) have expressed their regret that the churches have so often departed, with respect to the deacon's office, from both the scriptures and their own professed principles.

Now, why have they so departed? Can there be any good reason assigned why all congregations should not have deacons, as the Christian congregations had in Jerusalem, in Greece, in Asia Minor, in the whole Christian world in the apostolic times, and in all the Reformed Churches? Can any apology be offered for neglecting this part of the organization given to the church by her blessed Head? Will it be said that there is no need of deacons; that there are no labours for the deacon to perform? Perhaps it may be found that more than one mistaken notion is contained in such a view. "The poor," says Christ, "ye have always with you." Therefore, were it so that the deacon's office embraces no more extended range of duties than those involved in the taking care of the poor, (a great mistake, however, as will be soon shown,) we have the authority of Christ himself for affirming that the deacon should always be reckoned among the church's officers.

* Body of Divinity, Book vii. Chap. II. and Dictionary of the Bible, under the word "Deacon."

And, assuredly, if it be the duty of the Christian church to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and promote the comfort of the destitute, it is hard to believe that she may dispense with that very office, which the gracious King of Zion has instituted to attend continually to this very thing.

Perhaps it may be found, that *human* wisdom has contrived to distribute the duties of the deacon's office; assigning some to other ecclesiastical officers, some to civil officers, and some to individuals, while some may be neglected altogether; so as to render this officer of Christ's appointment apparently unnecessary. What right have men in this manner to re-arrange any part of the church's order, and then pronounce a part of it to be unnecessary? For example, what right and warrant have the pastor and elders of a congregation to set aside the deacon, and undertake to perform his duties? Would not the same process of reasoning be equally available to set aside the ruling elder? All Presbyterians maintain that the pastor is to rule in the congregation. Would it be right to supersede the elder, by coolly asserting, that, as the power of government belongs to the ministry, it is *unnecessary* to ordain ruling elders? Would any Presbyterian grant this? Yet the steps in the argument are precisely the same. It is granted—it is maintained, that the ruling elder's office embraces within it that of the deacon; but this no more warrants the neglect to appoint deacons, than the fact that the pastor's office embraces that of the ruling elder, warrants the church to commit her government entirely to the ministry.* Moreover, as will appear in the sequel, to dispense with the deacon, throws too heavy a burden upon those who would undertake *his* duties, in addition to their own.

Perhaps, it may be asked, "Have our fathers been in the wrong in this matter? Have they not lived usefully, been edified, and died in faith, without recognising either the validity or importance of this office?" All this is not our business. The question is not, whether has the church been more or less guilty, but *what does Jesus Christ require of us?* Besides, our fathers of the reformation had deacons, all the Reformed churches had them. In neglecting to ordain them, we have forsaken their footsteps: and the longer we have strayed, the greater need to turn and reform. "They have been edified without this office in their congregations." True, and many a soul has gone

* See quotation from Rutherford's *Due Right of Presbyteries*, p. 15.

to heaven from congregations where they never had a *ruling elder*. The great and good President Edwards, during the greater part of his life, belonged to a church that had no ruling elders. This has nothing to do with the subject. The question is not, whether the deacon is *essential* to the organization of a congregation, or not. This is not affirmed. But is it not the will—the command of the church's Head, that this class of officers be ordained in the church? This has been proved from scripture, and confirmed by the “footsteps of the flock.” The deacon is a standing ecclesiastical officer. What are his duties?

CHAPTER II.

The Nature of the Deacon's Office.

ON the subject of this chapter there has long been, and still is, great diversity of opinion and practice. Nearly all Christian churches agree, at least in theory, that the Deacon's office constitutes a part of the order of God's house. There is not the same unanimity of sentiment respecting the nature of this office, and the duties of the deacon. Episcopalians maintain that it is a spiritual office, and that deacons are an order of *preachers*; Congregationalists, that the deacon *rules* in spiritual things. Episcopalians are clearly in error upon this subject, because, neither in the narrative (Acts vi. 1—6) of its original institution, nor in any other passage of scripture referring to the office of the *deacon*, is there any intimation that the deacon was intended to be a minister of the gospel. But the very contrary. The *express* intention of the office is said to be, the relief of the apostles from a portion of their labours, that they might have leisure for the ministry of the word. Ver. 3, 4: “whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” Nothing can be more evident than this: that the “business” of the deacons, and the “ministry of the word,” are different employments; and, indeed, that proper attention to the one is somewhat inconsistent with due attention to the other. It is impossible that a class of officers expressly instituted to relieve the ministry from the burden of attending to pecuniary affairs, should themselves be gospel ministers. The preaching of Philip* is easily explained. He became an evangelist, (Acts xxi. 8,) having “purchased to himself a good degree.”†

* Acts viii. 5.

† 1 Tim. iii. 13.

The deacons of Congregational churches resemble very much the ruling elders of Presbyterian churches.* This, also, is an evident departure from the scripture model. There is not the most remote intimation that the deacon was designed to rule. His "business" is plainly stated, to be attendance upon certain duties connected with, and belonging to the care of fiscal concerns; but not a word respecting government as attached to this office.†

To the office of the deacon belongs,

I. *The Care of the Poor.*

It is evident from the account in Acts vi. 1—6, that the deacons were designed to take special care to promote the comfort of the poor. The disciples had made up, with remarkable liberality, a large common stock.‡ From this stock *all* were supported. The poor had their supply from this source. In Rom. xii. 8, the duties of the *deaconship* are said to be "giving" and "showing mercy." That the church at that time acknowledged her obligations to furnish support to the poor, needs no proof. The manner in which this subject is referred to in the narrative of the original institution of this office, and elsewhere, fully warrants the inference that one part, and an important one, of the deacon's duties, is the oversight and care of the temporal condition of the poor.§ This is generally admitted. It is, therefore, unnecessary to dwell longer upon the proof.

The apostolic churches *felt*, as well as acknowledged, their obligations in reference to the care of the poor, particularly widows and orphans.|| To attend to this sacred duty they chose, and ordained deacons. Nor is it to be supposed, that their duty to the poor was limited to the mere furnishing them with pecuniary support. The high qualifications required in the deacons,¶ warrant us to infer that they have a wider range of duty. Moreover, pecuniary assistance is not that which is alone, or chiefly, needed by the objects of the Christian's charities. They

* Dwight's Theology, Sermon clv.

† Congregationalists limit the office of the deacon, so far as it is concerned with pecuniary affairs, entirely to the supply of the poor. See same sermon. This, as will be seen in the sequel, is unsriptural, and at variance with the doctrines and practice of the purest churches.

‡ Acts ii. 44, 45; iv. 32—37.

§ See 1 Tim. v. 3—16; Rom. xii. 7, 8; 1 Pet. iv. 11.

|| They must be "widows indeed." Those who could maintain themselves, or had relations to provide for them, were not to be burdensome to the church.

¶ 1 Tim. iii. 8—13.

need advice and encouragement. The young, especially orphans, require to be properly educated, and their steps governed by the hand of kindness and charity. For want of proper instruction and counsel, how many baptized children, whose parents have been removed from them by death, have been lost to the church, and to themselves! Here is a wide field to be occupied by the deacon; he must feed the poor, as the almoner of the church's bounty; and he must do more. He must give to the necessitous advice, and impart to them comfort; not as a spiritual guide, but as a kind friend, and particularly, as sustaining to the desolate and friendless orphan, a relation almost as intimate as the parental.

The importance of this department of the deacon's duties cannot be doubted. All we want is, a more lively sense of the condition of the poor and solitary, and conviction of the church's duty to supply *all* their need. That this duty will ever be properly felt, or attended to, uniformly and systematically, until deacons are ordained in the congregations, there can be no hope. The pastor and the ruling elders have, it is true, an official responsibility on this subject, of which they cannot divest themselves. But all pastors and sessions will find in their own experience, where they endeavour to perform their spiritual functions conscientiously, the need of just such relief as the ordination of a board of active deacons would furnish. This is particularly true of the pastor. He must devote much time to study and private meditation, that he may be able "rightly to divide the word of truth," as "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed." This, with the cares of government; visiting the sick; family visitation; catechising, &c., furnish ample employment for the most robust and industrious minister of the gospel. Who is to collect funds for the poor; to inquire into their state; to furnish them with what they require for maintenance; and to watch over the children of deceased or helpless church members? The elders might attend to all this, but not as it should be attended to. Nor is it their special duty. It is a distinct, and often a very large field of operation, from the other duties of the eldership, and is liable to be neglected. The remedy is to be found in the ordination of a competent number of deacons. That they may perform all their duties in this matter, congregations should be furnished with these scriptural officers, according to Christ's institution, and the practice of the church of Christ in her purest times.

II. *The Deacons should collect and distribute all the Contributions for ecclesiastical Purposes.*

This office was not instituted *solely* to attend to the poor. The functions of the deacon's office embrace the charge of all the ecclesiastical goods. This has been the doctrine of the great body of Presbyterians from the earliest periods. Independents and Congregationalists restrict this office, so far as the care of funds is concerned, to those set apart for the poor.* The scriptures, and the "footsteps of the flock," both, with equal explicitness, confirm our views of this subject.

I. The Scriptures.

Acts vi. 1—6: "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples *unto them*, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them."

This passage contains the history of the appointment of the first deacons in the New Testament church.† That we may have a complete view of the whole of this transaction, we must go back a little, and ascertain what was "*the daily ministration*" of verse 1, the "*serving tables*" of verse 2, and the "*business*" of verse 3. This we learn from chapter ii. 44, 45: "And all that believed were together, *and had all things common*; and sold their possessions and goods, and *parted them to all men*, as *every man had need*. And chapter iv. 32—37: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own: *but they had all things*

* See Dwight's Theology. Sermon clv.

† See Miller on the Ruling Elder, page 219.

common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus : and great grace was upon them all. *Neither was there any among them that lacked :* for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and *laid them down at the apostles' feet :* and distribution was made unto *every man according as he had need,*" &c.

From these passages, it appears that the "daily ministration" was the management, for public purposes, of a common stock created by the contributions of the disciples : that from this stock *all* the ecclesiastical expenses were defrayed, and, likewise, the poor, if there were any, supported. The apostles, and other ministers, were supported from this fund ; and the other charges (and there must have been some) attendant upon the dispensation of the Lord's Supper, and other ordinances, were, unquestionably, defrayed out of it, *for there was no other source whence they could be drawn.* It is plainly impossible that there could have been any fund, at that time, distinct from this common stock, or another fund under the control of distinct officers, such as the Trustees or Committees of modern times. Such officers could not have existed. The funds required for the promotion of the good of the whole body, and to meet all demands upon the church, were "thrown *together* at the apostles' feet."*

Indeed, the very circumstance that is sometimes relied upon as favouring the view, that the "widows" were chiefly concerned in this ministration ; namely, that when they "were neglected" the deacons were appointed, is, of itself, enough to show that "this business" was not mere-

* It should be remarked here, that a part of the transactions recorded in these passages was extraordinary, and, consequently, not a rule to others. The casting all their property into a *common stock* was extraordinary. This is manifest from the case of Ananias and Sapphira. Acts v. 1—10. Peter says : "Whilst it remained was it not thine own? and after it was sold was it not in thine own power?" The liberality of these disciples *exceeded.* In other respects, their conduct was according to those laws of moral duty, which are universally binding upon church members : who are always under obligations to take care of the poor ; to maintain the ministry ; to make other necessary provision for attendance upon, and dispensation of, gospel ordinances ; to spread the gospel, and to promote the temporal welfare of the brethren as they have opportunity. To accomplish these purposes this *common fund* was formed : but with *extraordinary* liberality, so "that none among them lacked." This was the more remarkable, as the multitude of foreign Christians at Jerusalem was, probably, great at that time.

ly attending to the poor. For then it would follow that the apostles had *altogether* neglected to attend to the *very object* for which the contributions were thrown at their feet! This is impossible. It therefore appears plain, that there were other objects contemplated in the formation of this fund, attention to which interfered in some degree with due attention to the "Grecian widows."

The "business" over which the deacons were appointed was the *whole* of this daily ministration—the *whole* service of the tables. The apostles themselves say, referring to the *whole* of that charge, which they had at first undertaken, and for a time managed, that the deacons were appointed "over *this* business." It is plain, therefore, that the entire fund formed by contributions for ecclesiastical purposes, was at first managed by the apostles, and by them transferred to the *deacons*. There could have been at that time no other officer, such as a trustee or committeeman, appointed to any part of this charge. The *whole* was first placed in the apostles' hands,* the *whole* was placed in the hands of the deacons when they were ordained. These are the views which have been entertained of this passage by the purest churches, and by the greater part of judicious commentators.

As this passage has a very important bearing upon our investigations respecting the deacon's duties, a few quotations, and but a few, for our space is limited, are given from standard commentators; with the hope that the reader will carefully examine the passage, in the light thus reflected upon it. These quotations are not classified; our limits do not admit of this. They are given, however, nearly in the order of time, beginning with *Origen*, one of the early fathers. He lived in the commencement of the third century, a little more than one hundred years after the death of the apostle John. He says, "The deacons preside over the *money tables* of the church," and adds, "*as we are taught in the Acts of the apostles.*"†

Passing over many centuries, our next quotation is from *BEZA*, the distinguished colleague of John Calvin, in the Theological School at Geneva. He explains the passage, "*To serve tables*"—"to attend to that which was then observed, the common tables, *and the other necessities of the church.*"‡

The *Scottish Reformers*, in the Second Book of Disci-

* Acts, Chapters ii. and iv.

† Treatise 16th upon Matthew.

‡ Commentary on Acts vi. 2.

pline, chapter ix., are very explicit. "In the apostolic kirk, the deacons were appointed to collect and distribute what sum soever was collected of the faithful, to distribute unto the necessity of the saints; so that none lacked among the faithful. *These collections were not only of that which was collected in manner of alms, as some suppose, but of other goods moveable and immoveable, of lands and possessions, the price whereof was brought to the feet of the apostles.*"*

HENRY.† "And these (the deacons) must take care of the church's stock; must review, and pay, and keep accounts; must buy those things which they had need of against the feast, (John xii. 29,) and attend to all those things which are necessary," in *ordine ad spiritualia*, "in order to spiritual exercises, that every thing might be done decently, and in order, and no person or thing neglected."

SCOTT.† "To lay out their contributions in the most satisfactory manner, both among the poor and in other necessary expenses."

GUYSE.† "As all the necessary expenses for carrying on the worship of God, and as the apostles themselves, as well as the poor, were doubtless to be supported out of the common stock, I have given such a paraphrase as may take in the Lord's table, and the tables of the apostles."

DICK.‡ "It is true, indeed, that, as the design of the institution was not to divert the attention of the apostles

* This quotation from the Second Book of Discipline should have the most respectful consideration. The nature of the deacon's office was closely and actively examined in Scotland for many years previously to the compilation and adoption of this Book of Policy. The reformers contended for the deacon's office, as instituted to attend to *all* the church's temporalities, while Mary, and her son James VI. were violently opposed to the deacon. The discussion was protracted and zealous. The court party contending that the contributions laid at the apostles' feet were *alms* for the poor alone; the reformers advocating the doctrine we have quoted. No opinion was ever formed more deliberately, or under circumstances better calculated to elicit the truth.

† On Acts vi. 1—6.

‡ Dick's Theology, Lec. c. This remark is introduced here, as it evidently refers to Acts vi. 1—6. It was *drawn* from this distinguished theologian by the force of truth: for, in the same paragraph, he endeavours to "apologize" for the neglect to appoint "deacons in all their congregations," by saying that ruling elders can perform all their duties! Had this intelligent divine fixed his eye steadfastly upon the *scriptural office*, as he admits it to be, of the deacon, to attend to *all* the temporal concerns of the church, instead of "apologizing" for the neglect to appoint them, and thus soothing the church in her negligence, he would have been led to use his great influence in restoring, in that large denomination to which he was attached, this almost forgotten part of the church's organization, to its true position.

from the ministry of the word, *the care of the temporal matters in which the church is concerned may be considered as belonging to deacons.*"

DR. MILLER, of Princeton. "It is not suitable that we should leave the word of God, and devote ourselves to *pecuniary affairs.*"*

These quotations are sufficient to show, that the interpretation we have given of the passage under consideration is, by no means, singular. Other testimony will be adduced soon, from sources equally entitled to consideration, to establish, farther, the principles we have laid down in reference to the duties of the deacon.

The early Christians, in committing the management of all the ecclesiastical goods to none but *ordained* officers, did precisely what the members of the church had all along been doing, at least for fifteen centuries. During the Old Testament dispensation, this order had always been observed; at least from the giving of the Mosaic law. The funds set apart for ecclesiastical purposes were derived from various sources,† some of them peculiar to the Jewish economy, others moral and permanent, but from whatever source, or however contributed, they were, *without any exception*, committed to the priests and Levites.‡

The only instance in which there even *appears* to have been a departure from this invariable rule, established by express divine appointment, occurred in the reign of Joash (or Jehoshaphat.)§ This King, under very peculiar circumstances, assumed to some extent the direction of the funds, to be employed in repairing the temple. This direction extended, however, no farther than to the issuing of an or-

* A foot note to p. 227, of the treatise upon the Ruling Elder, contains so judicious a commentary upon Acts vi. 2, that it is inserted entire. He says, "It has been supposed by many that the phrase 'serving tables,' in the history of the institution of the deacon's office, had a reference either to the *Lord's table*, or to overseeing and supplying the *tables of the poor*, or perhaps both. But I am inclined to believe that this is an entire mistake. The word *τραπέζα*, signifies, indeed, a *table*; but, in this connexion, it seems obviously to mean a *money table*, or a *counter*, on which money was laid. Hence *τραπέζιτης*, a money changer or money merchant. See Matt. xxi. 12, xxv. 27; Mark xi. 15; Luke xix. 23. The plain meaning, then, of Acts vi. seems to be this:—"It is not suitable that we should leave the word of God and devote ourselves to *pecuniary affairs.*" The passage from Origen, quoted above, is conclusive evidence of the soundness of this criticism.

† Num. iii. 47—51; Lev. v. 17; chap. xxvi. 27, 28, xxix., and Neh. x. 37—39.

‡ For a complete list of all the passages in the Old Testament scriptures that relate to the administration of the church's finances, see note B. An abstract is there given of them.

§ 2 Kings xii. 2, and 2 Chron. chap. xxiv.

der to prepare a chest and place it at the door of the temple,* and the appointment of an officer (the king's scribe, or the secretary of state,) to be present with Jehoiada, the high priest, or some one acting for him, when the money deposited in the chest was emptied out and counted.† In all this transaction there was no infringement upon the law enacted by the God of Israel respecting the ecclesiastical funds. The chest was at all times in charge of the Levites;‡ the highest ecclesiastical officer was always present, and actively employed in the management of these funds, with the king's scribe,§ while the presence of the latter was in the exercise of that extraordinary power which belonged to the kings of Judah, and was often exercised in times of disorder, by which they obliged all their subjects, not excepting ministers of religion, to attend to their respective duties.¶ This event, therefore, furnishes no exception to the observation made respecting the principle as always acted upon in ordinary circumstances.

That for so many centuries, by the immediate direction of the Lord Jesus Christ, the God of Israel, the ecclesiastical goods should have been committed to none but ordained officers, is a fact from which we may, certainly, derive some instruction. It is not affirmed that the mode of administering the ecclesiastical finances under the Old Testament, is literally applicable in all its particulars now; but we may and ought to deduce the *moral* principles which pervaded that dispensation, and apply them in reference to this subject, as well as others, on all suitable occasions. In civil order what was moral under the Old Testament economy, is still binding. Why should its light and power be entirely rejected in matters of ecclesiastical order? What was typical is done away, but what was moral still remains.¶¶

* 2 Kings xii. 9. It is here said, that "Jehoiada, the priest took a chest," &c.

† Ver. 10.

‡ Ver. 9.

§ Ver. 10.

¶ 2 Chron. xv. xxix. xxxiv.

¶¶ Ignorance of this principle or unwillingness to apply it, has led to lamentable disregard in civil things, of the wise provisions of the Jewish constitution. The London divines reply to the objection that "arguments for the form of church government, must not yet be fetched from the Jewish Church.—"2. We answer, the laws of the Jewish Church, whether ceremonial or judicial, so far are in force, even at this day, as they were grounded upon common equity, the principles of reason and nature, and were serving to the maintenance of the moral law. The Jewish polity is only abrogated in regard of what was in it of particular right, not of

Is there any thing typical in the principle which has been brought to view? Is there any thing in it which renders its application in New Testament times impracticable, or unsafe, or derogatory to Jesus Christ? The conduct of the disciples after the day of Pentecost, when under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they cast their contributions at the apostles' feet, furnishes a satisfactory answer to these interrogatories. Moreover, the apostle Paul, in the ix. chap. of 1st Cor., enforces the duty of contributing to the maintenance of the gospel ministry, by deductions from the Mosaic economy.

The organization of the Jewish synagogue, confirms the view just presented of the moral character of the principles imbodyed in the constitution of the church, during the former dispensation, in regard to the management of fiscal concerns. In the language of Dr. M'Leod, "There were several officers in the Jewish synagogue, and these were authorized to conduct the public worship, preserve the order, *and manage the finances of the congregation.*"* This latter officer was the *chazan* or deacon of the synagogue:† and in the words of Prideaux, "the *chazanim*, that is, overseers, who were also fixed ministers, and under the rulers of the synagogue, had the charge and oversight of all things in it, kept the sacred books of the law, and the prophets, and other Holy Scriptures, as also the books of their public liturgies, and all other utensils belonging to the synagogue." The order of the synagogue was, as all presbyterians hold, the model of that of the church under the New Testament dispensation. In the synagogue was an officer who attended to the poor, had the oversight of the place of worship, and managed the finances. This fact furnishes additional evidence that the deacon's office is not *solely* the care of the poor. The *chazan* of the synagogue had the care of the poor as a part only of his charge: the oversight of the fiscal affairs of the synagogue belonged to him. Such officers as the trustee or committee-man of modern days, were not known either in the order of the synagogue, or of the apostolic churches.

common right: so far as there was in their laws either a typicalness proper to their church, or a peculiarness of respect to their state in that land of promise given unto them. *Whatsoever the Jewish church had not as Jewish, but as it was a political church, or an ecclesiastical republic, doth belong to the Christian church.*" Divine Right, &c. p. 202. Ignorance of this principle, or its true application, not the principle itself, has confirmed Episcopalians in their erroneous views of church government. It should not be rejected on that account.

* Ecc. Cat. Quest. 51. † Prideaux's Connexions, Part I. Book VI.

The scripture argument for committing all the ecclesiastical goods to *deacons*, may be briefly stated thus: Both under the Old and New Testament dispensations, the Bible contains frequent allusions to the funds devoted to ecclesiastical uses—in *all cases* these were managed, until the canon of divine revelation was completed, by *ordained* officers, and such officers only; during the Old Testament dispensation by priests and Levites, during the new by *deacons*. Nor does the Bible contain any account of officers distinct from these, and *unordained*, to whom the fiscal concerns of the church either *were* or *might* be committed. The consequence is plain. Any other officers for the management of church funds are of human invention, and where they exist, occupy a place which should be occupied by officers chosen and set apart for this service according to Christ's institution.

II. *The duty of the deacon to collect and disburse all the ordinary revenues of the congregation, has been generally acknowledged and practised upon by the church of Christ.*

Origen, in the passage already quoted, says, that "the deacons preside over the *money tables* of the church." *Jerome*, who wrote in the fourth century, calls deacons the "ministers of tables *and* widows." *Zozomen*, an ecclesiastical historian of the fifth century, says, speaking of preceding times, that "the deacon's office was to keep the church's goods." Without, however, entering into an examination in detail of the history of the early periods of the church, let the authority of Calvin, respecting the office of the deacon during these times, suffice. He says,* "Nor was the situation of deacons at that time (the Nicene period) at all different from what it had been under the apostles. For they received the daily contributions of the faithful, *and the annual revenues of the church*, to apply them to their proper uses; that is, to distribute part to the ministers and part for the support of the poor."

The sentiments of Calvin himself, (easily discovered in the above extract,) are found plainly expressed in the same work, where he says, vol. iii. p. 100, "Now, let the deacons come forward, with that most sacred distribution which they have *of the property of the church*. And, more explicitly, in his sermons on the 1st Epistle to Timothy, ser. 24th, "But the deacons have *the treasures of the church* to dispense, that is to say, such as are wholly dedicated to God, and ought not in any wise to be applied to profane uses. . . . For the goods of the church (as we

* Institutes, vol. iii. p. 74.

call them) ought to be applied no other, but to the use of the church, that is to say, *to find the ministers, to find school masters,** which serve to preserve the seed of the church, and such other like things, *and specially to find the poor.*" These doctrines spread from Geneva over the neighbouring kingdoms, but not in all to the same extent. They were adopted, so far as circumstances allowed, in France, and Holland; and entirely in Scotland. In the French churches the ministry were provided for, and the other necessities of the church, as well as the wants of the poor attended to, by the ministration of deacons. In one instance, indeed, the first of these might be committed to other persons; namely, when the revenue out of which this item of expense was to be defrayed, arose from the rent of "a tenement."† Yet even in this case the persons charged were to be "commissioned and ordained by the church." The Holland church was never strong enough to throw off the Erastian power of the government; they always had deacons in their congregations; but in many, perhaps most instances, the funds for the church's maintenance were drawn directly from the coffers of the state. In some cases these officers were, however, accountable to the consistory. The principles of Junius and other Holland divines were scriptural, but their circumstances were unfavourable to the application of them.‡

The 1st Book of Discipline contains the principles of Knox and the earliest reformers in Scotland. They say, chap. xvii., "The deacons *should take up the wholerents of the kirk*, disposing them to the ministry, the school, and the poor within their bounds, according to the appointment of the kirk." After nearly twenty years' investigation, the doctrines of the church of Scotland on this subject were expressed in the 2d Book of Discipline, as follows: chap. viii.: "Their office and power (the deacons') is to receive and to distribute *the whole ecclesiastical goods* unto them, to whom they are appointed." And chap. ix., "*The goods ecclesiastical ought to be collected and distributed by the deacons, as the word of God appoints, that they who bear office in the kirk be provided for, without care or solicitude.*"§ It has been shown that these principles were carefully che-

* This was a common opinion at the Reformation. It was a favourite idea of John Knox. The principles of the first Book of Discipline, respecting schools and school funds, might be studied even now with great profit.

† French Church Discipline, Sec. xii. chap. I. Canon xliii.

‡ Gerard Brandt's Hist. Ref. Holl.

§ For farther quotations from this chap. see pages 13 and 27.

rished, and faithfully contended for by the reforming church of Scotland, for more than thirty years, against the almost unremitting opposition of the civil power, before they were admitted by the Parliament, and sanctioned by the law of the land. The Scottish church refused to accept of a full establishment upon any other principles. The 2d Book of Discipline remained, in fact, unsanctioned by the laws of the land for fourteen years, from 1578 to 1592, chiefly because the friends of truth, and the advocates of Christ's crown rights, refused to modify these principles on the subject of the *deacon's* office.*

This Book of Discipline was sworn to in the national covenant, and revived and ratified by the General Assembly 1638. It continued to be received as the church's Book of Policy during the whole of the second reformation. The Scottish Covenanters never either *altered* or *modified* these principles for which Knox and Melville, and a host of worthies had contended so long, and suffered so much. If they did, where is the evidence? Where is the declaration, or the law?

Perhaps some may suppose a change to have been intended in the adoption of the form of church government drawn up at Westminster, which says that "the deacon is to take special care of the poor." In regard to this, let it be remarked, First, the language employed is not at all inconsistent with the doctrines of the Book of Discipline. It is merely said that the deacon has a *special* business, by no means affirming that it is his *only* business.† Second, such a supposition is at variance with the *avowed design of the Solemn League and Covenant*. The first paragraph of that covenant is in the following words: "That we shall sincerely, really, and constantly, through the grace of God, endeavour in our several places and callings, the *preservation of the reformed religion in the Church of Scotland*, in doctrine, worship, *discipline*, and *government*, against our common enemies." Will it be said that the Scottish Church intended to throw aside her attainments, and reconstruct her order? The contrary was then and always declared. But, her principles respecting the deacon's office were no more an exception than those respecting the pastor or the ruling elder. Third, their adherence to their previous order and policy, *is expressly asserted* in the acts

* See foot note, p. 12, and Knox and Calderwood's histories, and M'Crie's Lives of Knox and Melville.

† More respecting this phraseology on pages 38 and 39.

adopting the directory for worship, and the form of church government. The act adopting the former has this clause: It is also provided, "*That this shall be no prejudice to the order and practice of this kirk, in such particulars as are appointed by the Books of Discipline, and acts of General Assemblies, and are not otherwise ordered and appointed in the directory.*" This shows that every part of these books, not expressly repealed, was still considered to be the doctrine and order of the Scottish Church. Where is there an express repeal of the principles of the Second Book of Discipline respecting the deacon? Had they altered their doctrines, they must have repealed many laws. Where are the laws repealing former enactments? There are none. The first sentence of the act adopting the directory runs as follows: "The General Assembly being most desirous and solicitous, not only of the *establishment and preservation of the form of kirk government* in this kingdom, according to the word of God, *Books of Discipline, acts of General Assemblies, and National Covenant, &c. &c.*" Fourth, among the interrogatories put to the elders of every congregation at the annual presbyterial visitation,* respecting the pastor, is the following: "And hath he deacons in the parish distinct from elders?" Among those put to the pastor; "Are the deacons faithful in their office, in calling and distributing *all the kirk goods*, and in having a care of the sick poor? Is your session rightly constitute, and all the elders and deacons duly admitted according to the acts of Assembly?" Fifth, it should be remembered, that when this form of government was adopted, the Church of Scotland had for more than half a century, not only professed, but (making some allowance for the time of the oppressions of James VI. and his son Charles I.,) had practised upon, the doctrines of the Books of Discipline respecting the deacon's office: that *seven years*, from 1638 to 1645, had elapsed from the renovation of the National Covenant: that there were deacons in her congregations actively employed in the discharge of their duties. Now, where is the law stripping them of a part of their office, and appointing, or allowing to be appointed, committee men or trustees, to fill the vacancy? There is no such law. There were no such officers. Could so great a change have taken place in so short a time—in an instant almost—unheard of and unremembered? We may rest assured that Scotland in her best days never repudiated

* Stewart's Coll., Book I.

the doctrines or the practice of her noble reformers on this part of the order of the house of God.*

The divines of the Scottish Church during that period, whose sentiments have come down to our times, while they lay great stress, and with evident truth and propriety, upon the duty of the deacon to take special care of the poor, the sick, &c., do not limit his office to this business alone. RUTHERFORD, as we have seen, considered the "*keeping of the church's fabric in good repair*," as belonging to the deacon's duties.† DAVID DICKSON, an eminent divine, and a very active and influential member of the Reforming Assembly, 1638, says:‡ "But the deacons not a little aided by their ministrations; for they took care respecting the salary of ministers, and the necessities of the saints, and distributed the public goods of the church." Again, on 1 Timothy iii. 8: "As to that which belongs to the election of elders and *of the guardians of the public treasury*."§ And again, on Romans xii. 8: "He that giveth." "The official treasurers of the church are referred to; *those who distribute the goods of the church*, and the contributions of the faithful, for *the public uses of the church*."||

The divines of England, although the church in that part of the island did not attain so high a point of reformation as the northern, held similar views on this subject; not in all cases, however, so clearly and decidedly. The celebrated JOHN OWEN is very explicit. He says,¶ "Whereas, the reason of the institution of this office was, in general, to free the pastors of the church, who labour in word and doctrine, from avocations by outward things, such as wherein the church is concerned; it belongs unto the deacons not only to take care of and provide for the poor, but *to manage all other affairs of the church of the same kind; such as are providing for the place of the church-assemblies,—of the elements for the sacraments, of keeping, collecting, and disposing of the stock of the church, for the maintenance of its officers, and incidencies, especially in the*

* In the act abolishing patronages, passed March 9, 1649, one reason assigned by Parliament is, that patronage is "contrary to the second Book of Discipline." These words are Italicised in the act.

† See quotation from his "Due Right of Presbyteries." P. 15.

‡ Expositio Epistolarum, 1645, on Corinthians xii. 28, "helps." "Diaconi autem ministris non parum opitulabantur, de stipendiis ministrorum, et sanctorum necessitatibus prospicientes, et publicæ facultates dispensantes." This work was published the very year that the form of church government was adopted.

§ The same work.

|| Do. on this text.

¶ Treatise on Church Government, chap. ix.

time of trouble and persecution." These views were, at least, not uncommon among the English Protestants, Presbyterian and Independent. Owen observes, in the same chapter, that "the deacon's office was so well known as to render it unnecessary to insist much on it." He described no novelty to the English churches, in defining the deacon as an officer to whom belongs the management of all the temporalities of the church. *The LONDON DIVINES say; "the deacons being specially to be trusted with the church's goods, and the disposal thereof, according to the direction of the presbytery, for the good of the church, &c."** The "good" not of the poor alone, but "*of the church.*"

These doctrines have been reiterated by many commentators and divines since the reformation. The opinions of Henry, Scott, Guyse, and Dick, have been already quoted in our pages.† BROWN of Haddington defines the deacon to be "an officer in the church, whose business it is to serve in distributing the elements at the Lord's table, *and to provide for and duly distribute support to ministers, and to the poor.*"‡ RIDGLEY, after mentioning pastors and ruling-elders as church officers, adds, "others, who have *the oversight of the secular affairs of the church, and the trust of providing for the necessities of the poor committed to them, who are called deacons.*"§ DR. GILL, on Acts vi. 2: "*And they (the deacons) are likewise to serve the minister's table, by taking care that he has a sufficient competency for his support,*" and on 1 Cor. xii. 28, the word "*helps,*" or "rather the deacons of churches, whose business it is to take care of tables; the Lord's table, the ministers, and the poor, *and all the secular affairs of the church.*" JOHN FAIRLEY, an esteemed minister of the Reformed Presbyterian church in Scotland, says of deacons: "their office relates to the necessities of the poor, *and external concerns of the church.*"|| Dr. MILLER, of Princeton Theological Seminary, well known as a very learned and able writer upon church government, says, that "the function to which the deacon was appointed by the apostles, was to manage the *pecuniary affairs* of the church, and especially to preside over the collections and disbursements for the poor."¶

* Divine Right, &c., p. 184.

† On p. 27.

‡ Dictionary of the Bible, on the word "Deacon." It is not so evident, as this very candid and excellent writer appears to think, that the deacon should serve at the Lord's table.

§ Body of Divinity, Philad. Ed. Vol. II. p. 553.

|| See his Sermon preached at the opening of the Synod, May 1816.

¶ On the Ruling Elder, p. 242.

Let us now direct our attention to the standards of a few of the Protestant Presbyterian churches. The Reformed Presbyterian church in Scotland, in her Testimony, expresses her views in the following terms: "Deacons are ordained upon the choice of the congregation, and are associated with the teaching and the ruling elders in distributing to the necessities of the poor, *and managing other temporalities in the church.*"* The same church in the United States: "The deacon has no power *except about the temporalities of the church.*"† He has, of course, "power *about the temporalities.*" The Associate Presbyterian Church defines this office thus: "The deacon is to take care of the poor, and to distribute among them the collections that may be raised for their use. It also belongs to him to provide the elements for the Lord's table, and other necessities, *and in general the charge and disposal of the funds or temporalities of the church,* according to the direction of the session, devolve on him."‡ The General Assembly Presbyterian church, after stating that the office of the deacon "is to take care of the poor," &c., adds; "*to them also may be properly committed the management of the temporal affairs of the church.*"§ This statement they confirm by Acts vi. 3, 5, 6. It is plain that this church intends to say, that by the *authority* of the Head of the church the management of the temporal affairs of the church may properly be committed to the deacon; or else, why adduce, in proof, that very passage of scripture which is employed to establish the *duty* of the deacon to take care of the poor, and of the funds destined for their supply?||

* Testimony, Ed. of 1837, chap. xi. sect. 11.

† Reformation Principles Exhibited, chap. xviii.

‡ Book of Government and Discipline, 1817, chap. ii. This body has lately revised her book of government, &c. The paragraph quoted above, has been altered to read as follows: "To the deacon belong the care of the poor, and the management of the temporalities of the church," chap. iii. sect. 7. It will be perceived, that the doctrines are the same, only more tersely expressed. For other opinions, see also Douglas' Errors in Religion, N. Y. Ed. p. 65. Taylor's Spiritual Despotism, N. Y. Ed. p. 321; and Buck's Dictionary under the word "Deacon," all of whom concur in sentiment with the writers, and church standards quoted.

§ Form of Government, chap. vi.

|| The following extract from a "Catechism on the Government and Discipline of the Presbyterian church," compiled by Presbyterian Divines in Britain, and which has had a large circulation in the Scottish churches, and in the Presbyterian Synod of Ulster, shows that the doctrines advocated in this essay are taught in these churches. The quotations which follow are from the third edition, Glasgow, 1838, chap. i. Quest. 15. "What are the ordinary church-officers appointed by Christ? Ans. Presbyters or Elders (called also Bishops or Overseers) and deacons."

It may, perhaps, occur to the mind of the reader as an objection to the view that has been given of the opinions of the churches, and of protestant writers, that they so often affirm that the deacon is an officer appointed "to take care of the poor." This phraseology is met with so frequently, that a superficial reader of ecclesiastical history, will be liable to infer that the protestant church has not been so unanimous in assigning to the deacon the charge of all the temporalities, as would seem from the historical view just given. For example, Calvin, in his discourses upon 1 Tim. iii. 8—13, says, "But the deacons are they which are appointed to have the care of the poor, and to distribute the alms." And again: "There must be deacons to have the care of the poor." Such expressions occur frequently in these discourses; and were we to stop here, and examine them no farther, we would infer that Calvin limited the deacon's duties to the care of the "alms," strictly so called, or the "poor's money." Farther examination of these very discourses, however, shows us that such an inference would furnish a very mistaken notion of Calvin's real sentiments upon this subject: for he proceeds to say, "*The deacons have the treasures of the church to dispense, &c.*;" and with greater minuteness observes, that "the goods of the church ought to be applied to find the ministers, &c."* So in the 1st Book of Discipline, chap. vii., the office of the deacon is said to be "to gather and distribute the alms of the poor." Taking this expression alone, and were there no other intimation in this document, or elsewhere, of the doctrines of the church of Scotland respecting the deacon's office, the inference would appear to be correct, that she restricted the deacon to the oversight of the poor alone. But in chap. xvii. the principles of that church, on this subject, are fully exhibited: and there it is said to be the duty of the deacons, "*to take up the whole rents of the kirk, disposing them to the ministry, &c.*"† By examining the whole document, we ascertain that when the deacon's office was said to be "to take care of the poor," there was no design to limit it to that only. The London divines, in the work from which we have quoted so often, employ similar phraseology. They say frequently that the "deacon takes care of the poor," and, at the same time, that he has charge "of the goods of the church."

Quest. xxxi. "For what duty were they (the deacons) appointed? Ans. To manage the temporal affairs of the church, and especially to attend to the wants of the poor, in order that the apostles or teachers might give themselves continually to the ministry of the word."

* See page 31, for the whole paragraph.

† See p. 32.

This apparent inconsistency is susceptible of a very easy explanation. They speak of the deacon as an officer appointed to take charge of the poor, in the same way that Presbyterians, in writing and in conversation, denominate the teaching-elder, a *minister of the gospel*, or a "*preacher*." The reason is evident. The ministry of the word is the great business of this class of ecclesiastical officers. It is greater than administering sacraments. Paul says, 1 Cor. i. 17: "for Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." In fact, there is no *direct* assertion of the pastor's right to rule, in any of the descriptive titles usually given to the *teaching* elder. Would the inference be a just one, in some remote period when circumstances had altered, that Presbyterians did not in the 19th century acknowledge the right to rule as belonging to the pastor, because they do not *commonly*, when speaking of him, bring to view this part of his official character? Would it be a fair inference that they denied ruling to be a part of the pastor's duties, because they call him the *teaching-elder* in contrast, *apparently*, to the *ruling-elder*? The unsoundness of such inferences would be shown by referring to other portions of the same documents, in which *ruling* is affirmed to belong to the pastor.

In this way, the apparent inconsistencies alluded to are explained. The care of the poor is a very important, and a primary part, of the functions of the deacon. Mainly, perhaps, for this reason, so high and extensive a range of qualifications is demanded of this class of officers. The reformers, consequently, spoke of the deacon repeatedly in terms that have given rise, in the present circumstances of the churches, (which have generally dropped the office) to mistaken notions respecting their views regarding the extent of his duties. They no more intended, when they referred to the deacon as appointed to the charge of the poor, to deny that the other temporalities of the church were to be under his management, than Presbyterians now intend to deny the ruling powers of the pastor, when they speak of him as a "*minister of the gospel*." All that is necessary to remove these mistakes, is a tolerable acquaintance with the history of the church, and a competent degree of familiarity with the modes of expression in use in times somewhat remote from our own.*

* The writings of the late Dr. McLeod, furnish an example of this use of language, and of designations. He says, in his Ecclesiastical Catechism, repeatedly, that the deacon is an officer "to take care of the poor." And even goes so far as to say, (how properly is not now affirmed,) that

Here the argument might rest. We have examined the holy oracles, and from them have established our principle. We have traced the history of the Christian Church by a path carried through her purest and best times, and portions, and have found a very satisfactory degree of unanimity of sentiment, and conformity of practice on the subject of the deacon's office. But our labours are not at an end, for the deacon has not only been excluded in more modern times, from the position assigned to him in the house of God, by Christ her head, but his duties divided, and subdivided among various humanly devised substitutes, or transferred without warrant, to other ecclesiastical officers. An examination of this branch of the subject occupies the following Chapter.

CHAPTER III.

Of Substitutes for the Deacon.

These are various. In some instances, the teaching and ruling elders perform all the duties of the deacon, and in others a part of them. In the congregations of the Scottish Establishment, the care of the poor is devolved generally upon the session; while the remaining functions of the deacon, those which respect the maintenance of the ministry, and the charge of the property of the church, are mostly discharged by civil functionaries. In the Presbyterian congregations of Ireland,* a similar arrangement subsists for the care of the poor; while the other offices of the deacon are performed, so far as they are attended to at all, by temporary and unordained officers, called trustees, or committee-men.

This is the mode which, more than any other, obtains in the churches in the United States. In very few congregations, comparatively, is the *office* of the deacon, as a distinct institution in the church, known at all. And where the *name* is common, as in the congregational churches of New England, it is employed to designate an officer resembling much more the scriptural *elder* than the *deacon*.

this office had its "origin in the existence of a class of paupers in the Church." Yet this distinguished writer held, and expressed very decidedly the views presented in this chapter. He says, p. 46, Ed. 1831, that the deacon was appointed *to remove the burden of the temporal concerns from the minister, and elders, when it becomes embarrassing to them.*" And in Quest. 80: "*Is the sole right of managing the pecuniary affairs of the congregation lodged in the deaconship?*" To this he replies, in substance, that they have this right, as the "helps" of the teaching and ruling elders.

* This is true, (with slight modifications,) both of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and the Synod of Ulster.

- If the doctrines advocated in this essay be sound and scriptural, there is something wrong in all this. If the Lord Jesus Christ has instituted a distinct office for the care of the poor, then the eldership have no warrant for taking its place, so as to exclude the instituted office.* If to this office belongs the charge of all the contributions of the faithful, then the substitution of trustees or committees for this purpose must be still more unwarrantable. All these departures from the scriptural model, and the footsteps of the flock, are not, however, equally reprehensible in principle or dangerous in practice. It is not so decidedly unscriptural to commit the whole oversight of the poor to the eldership, as to constitute boards of trustees for the administration of the finances; inasmuch as to the elder does belong in a certain manner,† the care of the poor, while the scriptures give no warrant for the latter at all.

It is difficult to define the precise position and character of what are denominated boards of trustees. They are *in* the church, but are not *of* the church. They have under their management that which most nearly concerns the interests of the church; and yet, *as officers*, the church can have no *knowledge* of them, or *control* over them. They collect and disburse the contributions of the church, for the support of her ministry, and for the erection and repair of her places of worship; and yet they are not the boards of the church. They cannot be defined; but they can be shown to be a class of officers not warranted either by the scriptures, or the usages of the best churches.

An historical fact, which has an important bearing upon this subject, should be attentively considered, and remembered. It is this: *The deacon and the trustee have never, for any considerable time, co-existed in any denomination of Christians.* Congregations there are, indeed, that, for a time, have had both; and there are churches in which some congregations have deacons, and others trustees performing the same duties. These are exceptions. It is a notorious fact, demanding no proof, that at present in churches where the trustee or committee-man has been

* The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, at its last meeting, enjoined upon all their congregations to elect and ordain *deacons*. The Associate Presbyterian Synod, in May last, reiterated their scriptural doctrines respecting deacons. It is to be hoped that both these denominations will complete the work they have begun, by abolishing the boards of trustees in their churches.

† See next Chapter.

allowed the management of the funds, *the deacon is very rarely found*. And equally notorious, that churches which retain the *deacon*, have *no class of officers corresponding to the trustee or committee-man*. For example, the French and Holland churches. The reason of this is evident. Either one or the other is unnecessary. An active board of deacons can attend to *all* the fiscal concerns of any congregation: an active board of trustees would find *deacons*, in the end, uncalled for. Moreover, they cannot but interfere with each other. In case the number of poor should be great, requiring for their sustenance more than the collections made *particularly* for their use, while the ordinary revenues were more than sufficient to meet the other current expenses, (a frequent occurrence) what is to be done? The trustees could not transfer the surplus to the deacons without incurring more weighty responsibilities than they would often be willing to undertake; while the deacons would not be satisfied to knock at the door of the trustees for the funds necessary to accomplish their deeds of beneficence.

But, whatever may have been the causes, the fact is as has been stated. Consequently, the question is not deacons *and* trustees; but deacons *or* trustees: *Christ's* institution, *or man's*. For unless the operations of the same causes shall be entirely changed for the future, we shall never see both these classes of officers actively employed at the same time, in the Christian church to any very considerable extent. Let us enter more into detail.

I. *Boards of Trustees are an Innovation.**

There were no such officers in the churches in apostolic times. There were no officers sustaining such a relation to the church, in the congregations of Geneva, France, Holland, and Scotland at the time of the reformation. Their introduction has been gradual; but, no doubt, keeping pace with the downward progress in doctrine and godliness, that has been manifest among most of the descendants of the reformers † There is great difficulty in

* By "boards of trustees" are not meant those boards, which, acting under the direction of the ecclesiastical judicatories in the management of church funds, such as those appropriated for Theological Seminaries, are likewise incorporated; but the boards of congregations, which do not sustain any ecclesiastical character.

† This remark is intended to refer to the whole period since the reformation. Of late years, frequent and successful attempts at reformation have been made in some denominations.

ascertaining at what time regularly organized boards of trustees first took their present position in the Protestant churches. In the United States, they were probably formed at a very early period. It is certain they made their first appearance in cities, where most corruptions begin. Pride and worldliness operate more powerfully in cities. There is a class of men to be found in most city congregations, that is (or was) almost unknown in the more retired country congregations. Men of active business habits, industrious and influential; but who, with these characteristics and habits, are lacking in that spirituality that would fit them to undertake a sacred office by solemn ordination. They may make very good trustees, and it may be thought prudent to render them useful. Or, there are men who do not even make a profession of religion, yet they are rich, and possess influence. The trustee-ship will exactly suit them: it forms a kind of *neutral ground*, neither belonging to the world nor to the church, where both may meet, and harmonize pleasantly together.

However introduced, boards of trustees are an *innovation*. Like other human contrivances, originally devised, perhaps, with the professed design to promote the good of the church, by furnishing such assistance as might be thought necessary to increase the efficiency of established gospel institutions; but in the result, either excluding wholly, or materially curtailing and changing these institutions themselves. As the singing of human compositions in celebrating the praises of God, has its rise in small beginnings: no claim is at first offered on their behalf to the *sole* possession of this part of God's worship. In the end, the psalms of scripture are excluded, and, perhaps, even reviled. Singing by choir begins very modestly: the object is merely to improve the music. In the end, the choir *claims* to be the seat of praise in the house of God. Trustees had no places in the apostolic churches. There could have been none at that time. The reformed churches had no such officers. Originally, as there is reason to believe, they were barely tolerated,* they are now, sometimes, supported as altogether preferable to *deacons*; and some, going still farther like the advocates of human psalmody, deny the office of deacon to be at all an important part of the order of the sanctuary. Trustees, *man's* invention, they would not dispense with: deacons, *Christ's* appointment, may be very well neglected! The history of all the corruptions we have mentioned is the

* They are *tolerated* only, in most churches, still.

same, for the general principle will always hold good: *a human invention, once tolerated in the church, will ultimately exclude, or throw into the shade a divine institution.**

II. *Boards of Trustees are unscriptural.*

The authority, or even the permission, of the Scriptures is not often pleaded in behalf of trustees.† The argument in their defence seems generally to take for granted, that, upon this system alone, can *all* the rights of the people be properly secured. It will be shown in the sequel, that the directly opposite statement is true; but, in the mean time, we remark that the scriptural order does by no means deprive the members of the church of an interest in the management of the ecclesiastical goods; *for deacons are chosen by the people and are the representatives of the church*; not, indeed, the *agents* of the people. And here, it ought to be observed, that there is great liability, in defending the trustee system, to employ arguments that are inconsistent with Presbyterianism; inasmuch as they often proceed upon a principle which assails the representative character of the church's government, viz., that to commit the management of the temporalities to the deacon, is to take them out of the hands of the church.

This evil, however, is not so great as another to which we now refer. Trustees' having no scriptural warrant, can stand upon no principle *that does not impugn the wisdom or the goodness of the church's Head*. If it is necessary for human wisdom to devise a system of pecuniary management for the church, then it follows that on this point her arrangements have been left incomplete by her blessed Head. That some arrangements are absolutely necessary for fiscal management, in all Christian congregations, no sensible man will think of denying. In the loose manner in which affairs of this nature are often left at the present day, the persons to manage, and the modes

* The Papacy furnishes the most complete example of this.

† The only attempt ever made, perhaps, to gather the office of trustee from the Scriptures, has been from 1 Cor. xvi. 3, 2 Cor. viii. 19, and it may be, one or two other passages of the same tenor. Besides the difficulty there will for ever be in establishing, from these passages, the right to commission any but a deacon to convey the church's contributions to Jerusalem, there are two others which are insuperable. (1.) It is absurd to say that the *mere* carrying of funds constitutes an *office*, and (2.) which is still more fatal: If these texts prove any thing on the subject at all, they *prove too much, even for the advocate of the system we oppose*, viz.: that the people have a right to *appoint trustees for the poor's fund*, and thus *banish deacons* altogether; for the money conveyed was that sent to the saints at Jerusalem.

of management may not be very distinctly defined; but in the most loosely constructed congregation *some* method, either understood or defined, must be adopted for managing fiscal concerns. In the apostolical times, (among pagans and pagan institutions,) the circumstances of the church were not, in this respect, materially different from her present condition in nearly all countries. Such arrangements were imperatively necessary then. History shows that her wants have at all times been nearly the same. It is her duty to support the poor, to maintain a ministry, and to provide a place of worship.* Has the manner of doing all this been left uncared for by Jesus Christ, except one portion, that regarding the poor, which, however important, is a small portion compared with the whole? It has always been argued by Presbyterians, and with great and acknowledged force, that to affirm, as some have done, that the Head of the church has not instituted any government for her regulation, but left this whole matter to be arranged according to circumstances, is to charge the King of Zion either with ignorance or neglect; that, as a government is necessary, we might expect to find provision on this subject in the Scriptures.† The argument applies with equal weight to the subject we are now considering. And as the necessity which we have stated unquestionably exists,‡ we may expect to find something in reference to it, in the record of the institutions established by Jesus Christ in the church. We find this in the *deacon*; but no where else. If the *deacon* is not the officer for this purpose, then, in a very remarkable manner, has this whole matter been over-looked by the church's Head.§ This view is the more important, as it puts us in the proper position for viewing the scriptural arguments already brought forward on this subject: *we should expect to find such an office as has been defined in this Essay.*||

* Symington (Dominion of Christ, p. 53.) puts this interrogatory: "While God has a visible church in the world, will there not be required outward erections for the ordinances of worship, and temporal emoluments for the support of its ministers and institutions?"

† M-Leod's Ecclesiastical Catechism, p. 44. Ques. 72: "That which is really necessary, Christ's care must have provided for his church, for he distributes different gifts to profit withal."

‡ The great variety of substitutes for the *deacon*, proves this sufficiently.

§ What then becomes of the doctrine of the Westminster Confession, Larger Catechism, Ques. 191, that the church should be "maintained by the civil magistrate?"

|| There is another aspect of this subject, which ought not to be left out

III. *Boards of Trustees are anti-Scriptural.*

This involves considerations, in some respects, more serious than any yet presented. It involves opposition to

of view. The trustee system separates the funds for the poor from the general funds of the congregation; and that without any scriptural warrant. And some even go so far as to say, that the ordinary collections which are made in many congregations, on the Sabbath, should be held sacred for this use alone.

The entire silence of the Scriptures in regard to any such distinct fund, is enough to set this opinion aside. Under the Old Testament dispensation, there was, unquestionably, no such distinction of funds. And as to collections made during the seasons of public worship, there was an explicit law, Deut. xvi. 16, 17, that none should ever "appear before the Lord empty," but "every man as he was able, according to the blessing of his God upon him," was to bring to the public treasury at Jerusalem. No one ever imagined this to refer solely to collections for the poor. It was this which was "gathered at the door of the temple," in Josiah's reign, and applied to the repair of the temple, 2 Kings xxii. 4—6. It was into this "treasury," that the "poor widow cast her two mites," Luke xxi. 1—4. In the reign of Joash, 2 Kings xii., these collections, taken up on the Sabbath, as well as the other days of the feast, were similarly applied. "The bag" which Judas carried, was the common treasury, for three years and a half, of our Lord and his apostles. From this their expenses were borne, and gifts made to the poor, John xiii. 29. The apostle Paul, in writing to the Galatian and Corinthian churches, merely recalls the law in Deut. xvi. He intimates to them that *the most proper time* to make collections for the church at Jerusalem, was the season of public worship. He does not prescribe that *all* these collections should be applied in that way: he does not, in the least, intimate that their own necessities, as a church, might not be supplied out of these gatherings. Moreover, these collections, when sent to Jerusalem, would there be improved in the best manner, undoubtedly, for promoting the good of the church. They were not designed solely to feed the poor. They were sent to strengthen a feeble church, as in our times is often done. So the church has always explained this matter. And in all churches Sabbath collections are appropriated to various ecclesiastical purposes. Therefore, there can be *no distinct fund*, from that source at least, for the use of the poor. And, it is scarcely possible to imagine any other source whence a distinct fund for the poor can emanate.

Sabbath collections for pious uses, are a part of the instituted order for public worship. Deut. xvi. 16, 17. 1 Cor. xvi. 2. Dr. M'LEOD has stated the doctrine of the Bible, in reference to this subject, with great precision and perspicuity in his Ecclesiastical Catechism, p. 83, (ed. 1831,) in answer to the question: "How do we worship God, in making collections for the saints?" He says, "Collection is to be made for the support of those church members, who are in providence incapacitated to make provision for themselves, *and for other pious purposes*; Christians, in so doing, worship God by a public act, which testifies their dependence on Christ for worldly property, and their willingness to use it in his service, contributing on the Lord's day, according to the need of the church, in proportion to their weekly prosperity."

It would be of advantage, in more than one respect, to the church, if this part of worship were well understood, and *liberally* acted upon.

the authority of the church's Head. The radical principle of the trustee system is, that trustees and committees who perform similar duties, are no church officers—do not act in the name of the church's Head—and that they are the mere agents of the people. That the ecclesiastical goods; (except the funds for the support of the poor) namely, the funds invested in the place of worship, and those which go to the maintenance of the ministry, and other charges attendant upon the enjoyment and propagation of the gospel, are a mere *joint stock concern*, and differing from the property invested in a bank, or road, only in the circumstance that the revenue anticipated in the one case consists in dollars, in the other, in religious and moral improvement. That there is no dedication of property in the one case more than in the other. That it is in the power of the contributor to manage it as he does any other part of his property, either to attend to it himself, or to appoint one or more persons as his agents, to manage it *for him*.

It is difficult, indeed, to believe that any devout mind can contemplate without revolting at it, this doctrine as thus stated in its naked deformity. Yet it is certainly the fact, that this statement embraces the essential principle of the trustee system. This system is so interwoven with the habits of an age which knows nothing of the deacon, as to render some farther notice of it absolutely necessary.

The true doctrine respecting the ecclesiastical goods, is directly the opposite of that above stated, and is this: that the property which is appropriated to ecclesiastical purposes, is *dedicated* to the service of Christ, as the church's Head. And is to be managed therefore, under his authority as King in Zion, by officers of his appointment. There can be no doubt, for it is so said expressly,* that the contributions made during the former dispensation, were devoted to the Lord, and therefore could not be re-called, except they were replaced by an equivalent with a fifth part of the assessed value added to it. The cities, fields, and revenues of the priests and Levites are all called "the Lord's."† The materials employed in erecting the temple were dedicated.‡ Was there any thing typical in this? Was there any thing in it of such a character as to render it inapplicable now? The dedicated things were employed generally for the same purposes in all respects, for

* Lev. xxvii. 13, 15, 19, 27, 31.

† Lev. xxvii. 30.

‡ 1 Chron. xxvi. 26, 27.

which the ecclesiastical property is now used. And the most acute vision may be challenged to discover any thing typical in the devoting of the houses, &c., of the Levites and priests. There is positive evidence that this was not a circumstance peculiar to the Old Testament economy. Paul enforces the duty of furnishing a support to the gospel ministry by referring to these very institutions;* while in the case of Ananias and Sapphira there was both lying and sacrilege.

That ecclesiastical property is not a joint-stock-company concern, but something ecclesiastical, can be otherwise established. *It cannot be sold and distributed for the individual benefit of the members of the church, or the pew holders*; nor can the revenues be appropriated to the private uses of the members of the congregation. Nor, in case of removal, can any contributor demand an assessment to receive his share. And when, on the other hand, immigrants attach themselves to the church, or individuals make a profession of religion in a particular church, they become entitled to the benefits of the church property. Moreover, the poor have a real and true joint interest in the ecclesiastical goods, as well as the rich. This the trustee system would deny them.† There is, in the view in which we are now looking at it, an analogy to state property. The commonwealth is a moral person, and is capable of holding property, and deriving benefit from it. It belongs to no one individually, and all the citizens of the nation have an interest as citizens in it. So of town, county, and city property. The church is a moral person: so is a congregation, a presbytery, and a synod. They, therefore, can, and do hold property, when lawfully received, by a right with which the church is endowed by her Head. This is property *dedicated*. It is set apart for ecclesiastical purposes, to be employed in promoting the great ends of her organization in the world. And here we have the reason why the property of the church cannot be sold and distributed as private property. It belongs to the church of Christ. In other words, it is devoted to

* 1 Cor. ix.

† The law which requires, in some places at least, a year's payment of pew-rents, before the liberty is allowed of voting at the elections for trustees, and which, of course, excludes *the poor* entirely from any voice in this management of the funds, is perfectly consistent with this anti-scriptural system. It is carrying it out to its legitimate and sure termination. This will be the result, certainly, in most cases, when the system has existed long enough among any people to show its genuine character.

the promotion of her interests and ends, so long as it can be usefully employed in this way.*

Now, the system that we oppose really and practically denies all this. Denies that Christ has made any provision for the control of the fiscal interests of the church, denies that the church has any right to receive or control property;† denies that the poor in the church have all the rights of the rich. The connexion between the trustee system, and the erroneous views of church property just noticed, is abundantly evident. If the property set apart for religious ends, is, after all, *mere* joint stock property, then it is natural enough that it be managed just as a bank, or a road concern. And, on the other hand, if funds of this kind really belong to the congregation as a part of the church, and are ecclesiastical property, then the conclusion is unavoidable; the management of them should be intrusted to officers constituted agreeably to the will of the Head of the church, by the choice of the people, and by ordination; that is, to *deacons*.

IV. *Boards of Trustees are of dangerous tendency.*

As they are ordinarily constituted, this is unquestionable. In many congregations, having boards of trustees, individuals are chosen to that office who are not even professors of religion, and whose recommendations are

* In the xxxviii. Note to M'Crie's Life of Knox, there are some brief, but interesting notices of opinions of the Scottish ministers on the subject of the property of the church. This author says, that they held that "property, which had been set apart, and given for religious uses, could not justly, or, without sacrilege, be alienated, as long as it was needed for those purposes." An extract is given in this note from Sermons against Sacrilege, by Robert Pont, a son-in-law of John Knox, and a very distinguished divine. They were written by the appointment of the General Assembly, in the year 1591. He replies to the objection, that the Levitical law is abrogated, and that, therefore, authorities from the Old Testament are of no force now, as follows: "I answer concerning those lands, or annual rents out of lands delated and given to the Kirk, that although the Levitical law, with the ceremonies thereof, concerning the outward observation hath taken an end, and is fulfilled in Christ, *yet the substance* of the policy, concerning entertainment of the service of God, and uphold of religion, still remains. And it is no less necessary, that the ministry of God among us be maintained: and that sufficient provision be made to secure other godly uses, &c. &c." Again, Pont says, "albeit in their own nature they be like other earthly possessions; yet in so far as they are applied to an holy use, they may well be called holy possessions and rents, as the kirk is holy, to whose use they are appointed."

† Carry this out, and what becomes of Theological Seminaries, Libraries, Mission Boards, &c. &c.?

solely of a worldly character. It is manifest that a board, thus constituted, either in whole or in part, must have ultimately an injurious influence upon the cause of truth and vital religion. Leaving out of view altogether, the direct and powerful temptation to trim and accommodate, which must beset the ministry in congregations whose fiscal concerns are all under such management, this hurtful influence will be felt in other ways. The sacredness of the ministerial office will be affected. The pastor will be in danger of degenerating into a mere temporary hireling, and his support not considered as a religious duty, any further than it is incumbent to pay a hireling his wages.*

* This result has been already developed to a lamentable extent. It has become common, in some denominations of Christians, for clergymen to *hire themselves out*, to congregations, to preach for six months, nine months, a year, &c. ! To make bargains, previously to receiving a call where the pastoral relation is constituted, which by the old laws of the Reformation was a censurable offence, is an every day matter. To such an extent has this evil gone, that of about thirteen hundred ministers belonging to the General Assembly Presbyterian Church, (Old School), four hundred and eighty-one are stated supplies, or more than *one-third*; while, in some instances, nearly whole Presbyteries have been mere stated supplies. The views of a writer in the "Presbyterian," one of the organs of the Old School General Assembly, are remarkably correct on this point. Some of them are quoted, contained in that paper of June 6, 1840. After stating that "there was no such thing as a church and congregation associated together, in the apostolic age, in the support of divine institutions," he goes on to say: "It is far otherwise now. Not only are there regular congregations associated with every church, but in our own, and many other countries, legal provision is made to collect and disburse the temporalities of the whole united concern. Hence, there are now legal officers, styled trustees, to perform those very duties *which once lay exclusively on the church alone.*" "I am constrained to say, that it is very questionable, whether it has not produced, or, at least, increased one of the most serious evils which the church has to contend with in the present day. In many parts of the church, the frequent failure of ministerial support, is constantly separating pastors and churches, thus blighting the labours of numerous years, and condemning the churches to long and cheerless seasons of silence and desolation. It is worthy of serious inquiry, whether the commitment of the support of the Gospel to a number of men who do not, as a board, feel that they are acting under the solemn responsibilities of religion, and the obligations of church officers; whether their duties would not be more faithfully performed, if they were committed to men who felt that they are "*ordained of God,*" for this, as well as other important services, and that they have vowed before heaven and earth to be faithful to their trust? And would not the church itself be more likely to be kept awake to the important subject of ministerial support, if faithfully urged to it by the officers whom they had chosen for this self-same service?"

It is to be hoped that not a few in that body begin to reflect upon that very remarkable arrangement, by which a "church," a body of Chris-

The example of many of the most prominent men in the congregation, on the side of irreligion, must have a tendency to prevent accessions to the church. Nearly as high privileges of honour and influence as the church has to bestow, can be enjoyed by worldly men. Such men occupy a station hardly inferior in prominence and power to that of the eldership. Cannot the fewness of male members in many churches, where the appearances of prosperity are otherwise great, be traceable in part to this cause?*

Such a board has the pecuniary support of the pastor in their power, and that without redress. Should the pastor, by faithful preaching, or discipline, offend the trustees, he has no protection from that kind of vengeance which they might attempt to inflict upon him, except such as the civil law affords.†

But were it so that none of these evil effects, which have been specified, should result from the system of trustees, the silent and gradually operating influence which such a commingling of the world and the church has had upon the churches, and must necessarily have, would of itself be sufficient to excite the alarm of pious and thinking men. What, for example, would be thought of a system which would place the funds collected for missionary and education purposes, or the funds of the theological seminaries of the churches, under the control, irresponsible to the authorities of the church, of worldly men, or even of men wanting an *ecclesiastical* character, although church members? Every one knows the long and vehement conflict waged on this very subject in the General Assembly, before the division of the Presbyterian Church. That whole controversy was, in fact, upon the

tians, and a "congregation," a part of the world, thus intermingle and entwine themselves together.

* The paucity of male members in the churches of some of the larger denominations, is notorious. It was stated on the floor of the General Assembly in May, 1840, that there are many churches in connexion with that body, especially in the South, which have not materials enough to make ruling-elders of, to say nothing of deacons. Yet they have their boards of trustees.

† This is no supposition. In one instance, in the city of Philadelphia, the salary of a minister was withheld by the board of trustees for nearly, or quite, two years. They had secured a majority through the operation of the principle that holding a pew entitles to vote for trustees, and by excluding, upon various pretexts, many members in full communion. Their purpose was, avowedly, to starve him out, because of his faithful reproof of Sabbath violation, intemperance, the traffic in liquors, &c. The writer has more than once heard clergymen regretting difficulties which attended their ministry, arising from this source.

question whether the funds devoted to the maintenance and diffusion of the Gospel, should be managed upon the principle and according to the mode of the trustee system, or upon the principle and according to the mode prescribed in the Scriptures.

Those who have not reflected upon this subject, may suppose that all these apprehended dangers can be easily avoided, by restricting the elective franchise to church members in full communion, or, at least, by limiting electors to such persons in the choice of trustees. But is such a restriction generally made, or can it be expected as a general rule? The pressing temptation to increase the funds and augment the resources of the congregation, may be expected to prevail over the feeble anticipations of evil from such a course, and to terminate, as has commonly been the case heretofore, in choosing non-professors as trustees. Nor is such a result to be anticipated only in the larger denominations. Not many years ago, when a city congregation, in connexion with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, were arranging their mode of fiscal operations, the question whether pew-holders, not being members, should have a vote in the choice of trustees, was warmly argued; and although, in that instance, it was decided in the negative, the majority was very small. Had the decision been different, there was no redress upon the doctrine of the trustee system. Nor, upon this system, can any judicatory of the church ever undertake to decide the question, by enacting, by law, any such restriction: it must be left to congregations themselves.* This presents the subject in another aspect. Have congregations, upon the principle supposed, the *right* to make this restriction? Let us examine this point a little.

Suppose a congregation is making pecuniary arrangements: they meet, and subscriptions are given in by some persons who are church members, and also by others, who are not. What *right* have the church members, *if the trustees are mere money agents*, to take the appointment of them to themselves? Mark: the right of appointing trustees is supposed to be derived, not from citizenship in the church, and a consequent right to have a voice in managing the ecclesiastical funds, but from the fact of having invested money in the funds of a joint stock con-

* In another instance, in the same denomination, individuals, not members, of that church, and some not professors of religion, were chosen trustees, and for some time managed the funds. In the result, the members of the church in that congregation, lost the whole property.

cern. *All* have this qualification alike, (which is the only one known to the trustee system,) and yet one part take upon themselves to exclude the other from the management of *their own funds*; for they are supposed still to be theirs. It is true, the church members might refuse to receive subscriptions from any but themselves, or to let a pew to any other; but, as this is so improbable, we may leave it out of view altogether. It is not even *supposable* that churches will refuse to rent pews to non-professors. It would be too great an absurdity. And yet, if they do so, we repeat, they have no right, upon any other principle than that which we advocate, to exclude them from the management of the fiscal concerns.

To return to the proposition with which we set out: the trustee system is of evil tendency. This point may be still further illustrated by the laws and doings of nations. Nations derive a revenue, in many ways, from foreigners; yet they do not, on that account, allow foreigners a vote, even for officers who manage the revenue. The revenues are national property. The right to a voice in managing them is, consequently, a privilege of citizenship. No other doctrine would be listened to for a moment in the commonwealth. National security against foreign influence requires them to pursue this course. And should nations be more jealous of the intrusion of foreigners, than the church of God? Ought they to guard against the evils that might result from the control of their revenues, by men who are not bound by the ties of citizenship to the body politic; and should the church of Jesus Christ commit her revenues to those who are not citizens of this commonwealth of Israel, and thus expose herself to evils, against which the world adopts so many precautions? Truly, "the children of this world are, oftentimes, wiser in their generation than the children of light!"

V. *Boards of Trustees are not, as Depositaries of Church Property, so safe as Deacons.*

And that because they are, comparatively, *irresponsible*. Trustees are not, indeed, without responsibility to the laws of the land;* and provided they are church members, they are individually accountable to the courts of the church, for immoral or scandalous conduct. But they have no responsibility *as trustees* to any ecclesiastical tribunal, *as deacons* have.

* Deacons are also responsible to the laws.

Are they responsible to the congregation? Not at all. It is true they may be superseded at the termination of the period for which they were chosen, by another set of trustees; but, in the mean time, none of their acts, however deeply injurious to the interests of the congregation, can be remedied except by an expensive process at law. They may close the church doors against the minister and congregation; they may refuse to pay the pastor's salary, they may neglect to pay other dues, and in some of the United States* they may dispose of the entire property of the church. For such breaches of trust there is, indeed, a remedy by the courts of law; but what this is worth, in most instances, they know best who have tried it. When their term expires they may be voted out of office, but this does not furnish a remedy for past evils. And, moreover, their successors go into office equally unincumbered, and irresponsible. Their responsibility is therefore, practically, little better than nominal.

It is different with the *deacon*. He is equally responsible to the laws of the land with the trustee, for the law views him as such; and besides, he is responsible to the courts of the church. These courts can order the board of deacons to reverse their acts of malversation, and mal-administration. In the first instance they are chosen with care by the members of the congregation in regular standing as church members; they are then ordained in the name of Jesus Christ; and, then, besides their accountability to the courts of law, they are responsible to the ecclesiastical authorities. So that, considered merely as furnishing satisfactory guarantees for the just and faithful administration of the church's finances, Christ's institution will be found far superior to the contrivances of men.†

A system so highly objectionable, and so extremely liable to abuses, ought not to be permitted to continue in operation in any congregation; not even in those where it may still be in its infancy,‡ and has not yet assumed its more objectionable features. And particularly when it rests, as it always does, at least in part, upon the ruins of the deacon's office. Let congregations do their duty on this subject, and their own experience will satisfy them that Christ's arrangements are better than man's.

* New York, for example.

† For some observations upon the "Title to Church Property," see Note C.

‡ As in those congregations which manage their funds by temporary committees, chosen in various ways from among themselves, as emergencies occur, and which are not permanent boards.

CHAPTER IV.

Of the Relations of the Deacon to the other Ecclesiastical Officers, and to the Courts of the Church.

The deacon cannot be an independent officer. To suppose that when ordained he becomes a separate and isolated portion of the church's organization, would be an anomaly in social arrangements, and inconsistent with the fundamental principles of presbyterian church government. The fact that the deacon is *ordained* does, of itself, show that after ordination he is not independent in the administration of his office. As a rite, ordination is not only the instituted mode of imparting office-power, it likewise contains a very direct intimation of the subordination of its subject, in his official acts, to the spiritual authority of Jesus Christ, and to this, moreover, as exercised in the constituted courts of the church. No one therefore supposes it possible for a minister or a ruling elder to become independent in his official character, of the government of the church in which he is ordained to office: nor does the deacon. However, as this part of the subject is more liable to be enveloped in doubt, or obscured by prejudice, than any other, it is necessary to examine with some minuteness and care, the relations of the *deacon* to the government established in the Christian Church. This will be done from the Scriptures, from the footsteps of the flock, and from the rules of prudence and wisdom, as these are illustrated in the various departments of the social organization.

I. *The Scriptures exhibit the Deacon as subordinate to the Courts of the Church, in the Discharge of his Functions.*

The circumstance of the *ordination* of the seven,* as has been observed, fully establishes this statement. The twelve say to the multitude, verse 3; "Look ye out among you seven men, &c. whom WE may appoint over this business." They give no intimation that they were about to institute an independent order of officers; but in the very act of directing their election, the apostles claim the *appointment* as belonging to themselves. If the apostles had no concern in the "business," and were to have none, could such a course have been pursued? As plainly as actions can speak, do they show, in this instance, that the

* Acts vi. 1—6,

deacons were to be responsible to the apostles. In the narration of the events of the following thirty or forty years, contained in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles, there are frequent and decisive proofs that the duties for which the deacons were ordained as their special charge, might still be, and often were, performed by the apostles and elders. Paul says, that the apostles with whom he conversed in the city of Jerusalem, upon his return from Arabia, about three years after the ordination of the seven, "would only that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do."* This distinguished apostle was very active during his whole ministry, not only in giving directions, as he did to the Galatian and Corinthian churches,† respecting the poor and the maintenance of gospel ordinances, but likewise in actually ministering at times to the wants of the poor saints. His last visit to Jerusalem was for the express purpose of bringing alms to his nation and offerings.‡ These he brought, not by a commission received from the people, but as an official duty.§ And in another instance, we find the contributions sent to the city of Jerusalem, directed, not to the body of the people, nor even to the *deacons*, but to "*the elders*."||

* Gal. ii. 10.

† 1 Cor. xvi. 2 Cor. ix. The *deacons* must have been addressed in these instances, in their official character, as well as private church members.

‡ Acts xxiv. 17.

§ 1 Cor. xvi. 3, 4. "And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me." In this passage, Paul seems to speak of the *sending* of those whom the Corinthians might "approve," to Jerusalem, as his act: that *he* would give them the appointment. The mere carrying of funds, as has been remarked above, does not constitute an officer; but when Paul, *suo motu*, by his own act, takes this business upon himself, asking for no fresh appointment by the people, it is plain he thought himself competent to do it, as a minister of Christ. Moreover, it is worthy of notice that this appears to have been the way in which such contributions were commonly sent. Long before, Paul and Barnabas had borne to Jerusalem the contributions of the church of Antioch. Acts xi. 30.

|| Acts xi. 30. Most judicious commentators and critics, have deduced the same inference that we have, from this text. 'The Westminster Assembly directs us to this text, as proving that to the pastor and elders belongs the care of the poor. The London Divines say, (Church Government, page 184,) "The disposing and appointing how it (the alms) shall be best improved and disposed of *cannot be denied* to be an act of government, and for this did the elders meet together, Acts xi. 30." Dr. McLeod, Eccles. Catechism, ed. 1831, page 130, "*all* collections were delivered into the hands of the apostles and elders, the *presbytery*, Acts xi. 30."

These facts establish, beyond all reasonable doubt, the position above stated. Because, if the oversight and charge of *those very things*, which have been *specially* committed to the deacon, are still, *in any way*, incumbent upon the spiritual officers of the church, then is not the deacon the *sole*, nor an *independent* officer, in performing his functions. It may, perhaps, be supposed by some that this doctrine is true, so far as it is applicable to the case of the poor; but that it does not hold respecting the other functions of the deacon's office. If we remember, however, that the *whole* revenues, (as has been attempted, at least, to be shown in the second chapter of this Essay,) were originally managed by the apostles; and that they made the *same* kind of transfer of the *whole* of "the daily ministration," as of *any part* of it, at the ordination of the deacons: and then connect with these established truths the fact just now ascertained, namely, that the care of the poor, at least as to the general charge and supervision, still belonged to the apostles, we infer as the only conclusion from these premises, that the general charge and supervision of the whole temporalities still rested upon them. If the apostles did not divest themselves of all responsibility in regard to the poor, (and this is universally admitted,) neither did they in regard to the other interests of the church, that were *specially* intrusted to the deacon; for the very identical language which informs us of the one, informs us of the other. There is not even a hint, that two funds were afterwards to be formed instead of the one which had previously existed. Indeed, there is no scriptural authority whatever, for separating the funds appropriated to the use of the poor in the Christian church, from those destined to other uses.* The idea, then, of joint charge in the case of the former, and independency on the part of the deacon with regard to the latter, has no scriptural foundation to rest upon, for the Scriptures recognise no such distinction of funds. Consequently, if the other officers of the church have no oversight of the temporalities generally, they can have no other charge of the interests of the poor, than that which rests upon all the faithful: they have none in their *official* character. This is a conclusion that few would admit; if not admitted, the proposition which we have laid down contains the only true and scriptural view of the subject.

The statement contained in Acts vi. 4, may be deemed opposed to these views. The apostles say that they would

* See p. 46, foot-note.

"give themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." To those who may consider this text as containing an express relinquishment of all charge over the church's temporalities, we might reply by employing the *argumentum ad hominem*; for they, probably, in most instances, likewise entertain the idea, that "this business," verse 3, signifies only the care of the poor. If the deacon is an officer to attend solely to the poor, and the apostles relinquish entirely, in verse 4, all concern in that which they transfer to the deacons, what then becomes of the universally admitted, and certainly scriptural doctrine, that the apostles were still charged with the care of the poor? According to the objection, they conveyed *all* this to the deacon! This text cannot therefore, upon any view of the deacon's office, be supposed to contain an *entire* abandonment, upon the part of the apostles, of *all* the fiscal duties which they had heretofore performed. How is it to be explained?

The word, προσχαρτεροῦμεν, (for it is in the original but *one* word,) translated, "*will give ourselves continually to,*" is used eight times in the New Testament;* and in every instance, but two, it refers to the performance of religious duties, such as prayer and partaking of the Lord's Supper. It is compounded of προς, *with*, and κρατος, *strength*; and means, as its roots import, *vigorous and persevering attention*, but not *exclusive* attention. Stockius translates it, "semper alteri proesto esse," *to be always in readiness for another's service*. In none of those texts where it refers to devotional duties† can it mean *exclusive* attention; for the Christian has many duties to perform besides acts of worship: but he is so to engage in them, as "always to be in readiness for" God's service: he must not become entangled with natural and civil duties, so as to be incumbered and hindered in his devotions. This is finely expressed by this word. The use made of the same word in Acts x. 7, throws much light upon its meaning. Cornelius, the centurion, sent for Peter, "στρατιωτην ευσεβη των προσχαρτεροντων αυτω," *a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually*. Now, this soldier was not *merely* the attendant of Cornelius: he was still a soldier. In the mean time, however, he was released from the most burdensome part of his military duties, that he might "always be in readiness for the service" of Cornelius.‡ This

* Mark iii. 9. Acts i. 14, ii. 42, 46, vi. 4, x. 7. Rom. xii. 12. Eph. vi. 18.

† Acts i. 14, ii. 42, 46. Rom. xii. 12. Eph. vi. 18.

‡ The passage in Mark is similar to this one. Christ directs a boat to be kept in readiness for him.

was precisely the situation of the apostles. They were "stewards of the mysteries of the Gospel." To dispense these, was their *business*, their *employment*. Connected with this, were the care of the poor, and the oversight of the church's contributions. For a short time, the spiritual officers performed, unaided, the whole of their functions; until the less important had so increased, that to have attended to them properly, they must have "*left* the word of God to serve tables." To relieve themselves from the burden which rested upon them, they direct the people to choose certain persons, whom *they* would appoint over this business, so that they might have the opportunity of devoting their labours "to prayer and to the ministry of the word." There is no intimation, throughout the whole narrative, that the business was improper for them, but merely that "it was not reason that they should *leave* the word of God, and serve tables."

The deacons were, therefore, appointed not as independent officers, but as "*helps*," or assistants, to the spiritual officers. They are so called in 1 Cor. xii. 28.* That the *deacon* is meant by this title, is nearly, if not altogether, certain. Ruling-elders cannot be intended: for they are the "governments" mentioned just after. The pastor cannot be the "helper;" for his is the highest office in the church. The "*helps*" must then be the "*deacons*." This interpretation is strongly confirmed by the narrative in Acts vi. of their original institution; for in that passage they evidently appear as "*helps*."

Presbyterians have always taken the same view of this subject, when they say, as they often do, that the higher offices include the inferior; the pastoral including the eldership—the latter, the deaconship. This Presbyterian doctrine is clearly and beautifully stated by the LONDON DIVINES.† "For who," say they, "is so little versed in the Scriptures, but that he knows that apostles, pastors, elders, and deacons, are distinct officers one from another; yet all the inferior offices are virtually comprehended in the superior, and may be discharged by them; elders may distribute as well as deacons, and beyond them rule; pastors may distribute and rule as well as deacons and elders, and beyond both, preach, dispense sacraments and ordain ministers." And by DR. M'LEOD,‡ who says, "the ruling elders are their (the teaching elders') helps;

* For the views of many commentators on this text, see page 6, foot-note.

† Divine Right, &c., p. 112.

‡ See Ecclesiastical Catechism, page 47.

and the deacons the helps of both." DICKSON, on this word "helps," says, "the deacons not a little *aided* by their ministrations,"* &c. "*Aided*" whom? *The elders, unquestionably.* If the deacons are the "helps" of the ruling and teaching elders, then are they not independent of them in the discharge of any part of their functions.

If we cast our eye over the Old Testament dispensation, we find the same principle pervading it likewise. From the time of the giving of the law in the wilderness, until the canon of the Old Testament revelation was completed, the Levites, who were generally the actual administrators, of the ecclesiastical revenues, always performed their official duties in co-operation with the superior functionaries.† They were never independent. Nor were the deacons of the synagogue. We are informed by Prideaux, that the "*chazanim*, or *deacons* of the synagogue, had, *under the rulers*, the charge and oversight."‡ Brown of Haddington, says that "these two, (the *chazanim*), with the other rulers, form a council."§ Indeed, it is unquestioned, that the deacons of the synagogue were not independent, but subordinate officers.

These investigations show us that the apostles, to whom at first the management of *all* the ecclesiastical affairs was committed, still retained, after the ordination of a distinct order of officers to take charge of a specified portion of them, a general supervision. And it also appears, that this was in accordance with a principle which ran through the divinely organized ecclesiastical constitution of the Christian church under the Old Testament dispensation.

II. *This principle has been always acted upon by the Christian Church, in her purest times.*

On this branch of our investigations, it is not necessary to do more in reference to the doctrines and usages of the primitive church, than merely refer to them. That the deacon was not an independent officer in the church in the early periods of the present dispensation, is so well known that any detailed proof upon the subject would be

* See page 35.

† Num. viii. 19. 2 Chron. xxiv. 5, 11. Neh. x. 37, 38, xiii. 13. Our space does not admit of pursuing farther this part of the investigation. The reader is referred to the list of passages relating to this subject in Note B.

‡ Prideaux's *Connexions*, Part I., Book vi.

§ Dictionary of the Bible, on the word "*Synagogue*."

superfluous. Therefore, passing the primitive times, let us descend to the age of that great reformation, to which the reader has been so frequently directed. In none of the reformed churches was the deacon considered to be independent in the exercise of his office. Indeed, as we shall soon see, in most of them there were formed *consistories* composed of the pastor, ruling elders, and deacons, of particular congregations. The Book of Common Order used by the Scottish congregation in the city of Geneva, and which is substantially the same with that of the other congregations of Geneva, thus speaks of the exercise of the deacon's office. "The deacons must be men of good estimation," &c. Their office is to gather the alms diligently, and faithfully to distribute it *with the consent of the ministers and elders.*"* The principles of the Reformed church in France are very strongly and pointedly expressed. In her Discipline, Sec. xii. Chap. III. Canon II. it is said: "The elder's office is, together with the pastors, to oversee the church, &c. In general, it is to have the same care with them in all concerns about the order, *maintenance*, and government of the church." And Canon IV: "The deacon's office is to collect, and distribute, by the advice of the consistory, moneys to the poor, &c." And in Chapter I. Canon XXI. noblemen were "every one of them desired to constitute, in their families, a *consistory*, composed of the minister, and of the best approved persons for godliness in their said families, who shall be chosen elders and *deacons.*"†

* Dunlop's Confessions, Edinburg, 1722, page 383. The reader will have no difficulty in understanding, after the explanations that have been given in this Essay, that by "alms," is not meant what we call "poor's money." It will be remembered that Calvin uses, as synonymous terms, "alms," and "treasures of the church," and "church goods," meaning as he himself explains them, "the goods dispensed to the ministry, schools, &c." See pages 32 and 38.

† The word "*consistory*," which occurs so frequently in the *old* books of ecclesiastical policy, requires explanation. It is not found in the Scriptures. Neither is "session," "synod," or "general assembly." It is the *old* appellation in the Reformed Churches for all their church courts. Stewart's Collections, Book I. Title xv. § 35, "All church judicatories, but especially this, (the session,) were called consistories, where the judges did stand in administering justice." The word "*consistory*" is compounded of two Latin words, "*con*" and "*sisto*," and signifies to *stand together*. "Session," is from the Latin "*sessio*," a *sitting*. "Synod" from the Greek "*συνδος*,"—*meeting*, or *going together*. This name was more common among the Reformers on the Continent, than in Scotland or England. Yet it was not at all unusual there, as Stewart truly says in the above quotation. Stevenson* enumerates, among the

* Hist. vol. i. p. 164, on the year 1637. The reader should know, indeed, it is

The Holland churches were constituted in the same manner. They had "*consistories* (or assemblies composed of ministers, elders, and deacons) for overseeing church affairs."*

The Scottish congregation that was formed in Rotterdam by exiles from Scotland, during the persecution which followed the restoration of Charles II., not only had deacons, but these deacons sat in *consistory* with the minister and elders: for we find the following minute inserted in the register of their "consistory." "The session unanimously concluded that there should be five elders besides Mr. Wallace, whom we yet own as such notwithstanding what is gone against him: *and also five deacons.*"†

The Scottish church, from the rise of the reformation until her order was buried in ruins by the tyranny of an

grievances of the Scottish Church which led to the second Reformation, that "*consistories*, or sessions, were reckoned in the number of conventicles, and laick elders and *deacons* were rejected." This *old presbyterian* word is now sometimes used as a title by which to designate a "meeting together of *all* the officers of the congregation," to consult respecting its secular interests chiefly; the name "session," being reserved exclusively for meetings of the *teaching and ruling* elders for government.

* Gerard Brandt's History of the Reformation in Holland, vol. i. p. 314.

† John Brown, of Whampray, the author of the Apologetical Narration, was long the pastor of this congregation. The "Mr. Wallace" referred to, was Colonel Wallace, the gallant leader of the Covenanters at the Pentland Hills, in 1666. After that battle, he withdrew to Holland, and in 1676, was chosen an elder of the church in Rotterdam. The next year he was ordered to remove from the territories of Holland, in consequence of the threats of England. This was "what had gone against him." It appears from the fact above mentioned, that the Scottish congregation of Rotterdam, composed of some of the choicest of Scotland's sufferers, at that time, for religion and liberty, was constituted with "elders and deacons," who sat together in a body called a consistory. This form, it should be observed, was not adopted by them after the example of the Holland churches; they had been accustomed to it in the Scottish Church. The fact above stated, will be found in the March number of 1839, of the "Covenanter."

The following account of the form of government in the Waldensian churches, *at the present time*, possesses no inconsiderable interest in itself, and likewise, in connexion with this subject. The account is taken from the "Presbyterian" of Dec. 12, 1840. "They have their Synod, and their representative pastors, deacons, and elders. The pastors are elected by the parishes by free and open choice; and the elders are selected by their peers after a rigid examination. Out of their number, one is selected to fill the office of deacon, in whom is vested the alms, *and the properties of the churches.* The *consistory* is just a *church session*, consisting of the pastor, as chairman, the elders, and the deacon, and it is vested with the charge of the ecclesiastical affairs of the parish."

plain in the extract, that the "consistory, or session," in that church, was "constituted of elders and deacons."

apostate king and parliament, held without any wavering, the same doctrines substantially on this subject, with the Genevan, French, and Holland reformers. First Book of Discipline, Chap. VII. "The office of deacon is to gather and distribute the alms of the poor, *according to the direction of the session.*" We discover, by comparing this paragraph with Chap. XVII., that they did not limit the duties of the deacon to the care of the poor, but extended it to "the taking up of all the rents of the kirk, and disposing them to the poor, the ministry, &c." And by comparing it with Chap. VIII. § 9; that "the ministers, elders, and deacons, were to consult together," in disposing of the fiscal matters. In the Second Book of Discipline, Chap. VII., they say that "it pertains to the eldership, to take heed that the word of God be purely preached, &c.—*and the ecclesiastical goods uncorruptly distributed.*" They did not, of course, believe the deacon by whom these goods are distributed, to be an independent officer, or an officer accountable only to the people.

During the second reformation this church continued to hold the same principles. We find the Second Book of Discipline revived and ratified, and still held as law in that church, throughout this period of her prosperity and independence. In the year 1645, the general assembly issued, in overture, one hundred and eleven propositions on church government and order. The fifty-fourth mentions as one of the "things wherein the ecclesiastical power is to be exercised, *the treasury of the church and collections of the faithful.*" There is no evidence that this part of these propositions was ever objected to. The same principles pervaded her ecclesiastical legislation. The law of 1648 respecting meetings of session has the following clause. "The deacons are always present, not for discipline, but for what relates to their own office."* In Stewart's Collections, Book I. Tit. viii., after some general statements respecting the duty of the deacons to examine the state of the poor, and collect funds for their supply, it is added, "that the money so received be faithfully delivered up to the session, *according to whose judgment and appointment, the deacons are to distribute the CHURCH GOODS.* In which matters they have a decisive vote with the elders; but in other cases their opinion is only consultative, and they may always be present." This imbodyes the whole doc-

* It has been shown in the second chapter of this Essay, that the Church of Scotland considered the distribution of all the ordinary revenues to belong "to the office" of the deacon.

trine of the exercise of the deacon's office. He is to distribute the "*church goods*," and to have a special concern for the poor. The pastor, elders, and deacons, were to meet and act together; in making distribution, all having a "decisive vote;" while in regard to discipline, the pastor and elders alone voted. There is nothing here like official independence ascribed to the deacon.

The form of church government adopted in the year 1645, as a part of the covenanted uniformity with England and Ireland, states the same doctrine. After enumerating the three orders of officers, a pastor, ruling elders, and *deacons*, as belonging to a particular congregation, this document goes on to say, "These officers are to meet together at convenient and set times for the well ordering of the affairs of that congregation, each according to his office."* The pastors, elders, and deacons are to "*meet together*:" so far all is plain. It would be the merest quibbling to say, that the pastor and elders are to "*meet together*," but that the deacons are to meet by themselves; for then we must explain the whole paragraph accordingly, and we would have the pastor meeting by *himself*!" They are to attend to "*the affairs of that congregation*;" the *whole* affairs, temporal and spiritual; for in this manner unlimited expressions such as this are to be explained, unless necessarily limited, and here no such necessity exists. Besides, what is commonly understood by "the affairs" of a congregation? Certainly, its whole interests—its pecuniary affairs, as well as the affairs of the poor, and the spiritual affairs. None need to be told that the first of these—the pecuniary—are not only "*affairs*," but often very important ones. They are to transact these affairs "*each according to his office*." To arrive at the genuine sense of this clause, the reader has only to remember the laws of the church quoted above. The pastor, elders, and deacons, in the Scottish church met *together*. Discipline was managed by the pastor and elders alone—the other affairs by the joint action of all.

This cursory view of the exercise of the deacon's office in the church of Scotland, satisfactorily establishes the fact, that this, the purest of all the reformed churches, always considered the deacon an officer under authority, who was to be associated with the eldership in the discharge of his official functions. The most intelligent of the English divines agreed with the Scottish church in

this principle, as appears from that part of the form of church government compiled by the Westminster divines, to which reference has just been made. The *London divines* frequently express similar sentiments in their valuable essay from which we have already quoted so often. They say, "how it (the alms) shall be best improved, and disposed of, *cannot be denied to be an act of government*, and for this did the elders meet together, Acts xi. 30."

Again: "The deacons being specially to be intrusted with the *church's goods*, and the disposal thereof, *according to the direction of the presbytery*, for the good of the church."

Again: "The apostles, in the constitution of elders in every church, derogated nothing from their own authority, nor discharged themselves of their care. So, when they appointed deacons to take care of supplies for the poor, *they did not forego their own right*, nor the exercise of their duty as their other work would permit them. Gal. ii. 9, 10."*

JOHN OWEN† says; "yet did not the apostles herein utterly forego the care of providing for the poor, which being originally committed unto them by Jesus Christ, they would not wholly divest themselves of it. But by the direction of the Holy Ghost, they provided such assistance in the work, as that for the future it might require no more of their time and pains, but what they should spare from their principal employment. And the same care is still incumbent on the ordinary pastors and elders of the churches, so far as the execution of it doth not interfere with their principal work and duty, from which those who understand it aright, can spare but little of their time and thought." Again: "But whereas there are three things that concur and are required to the ministration unto the poor members of the church; (1.) The love, charity, bounty, and benevolence of the members of the church in contributions unto that ministration; (2.) The care and oversight of the discharge of it; (3.) The actual exercise and application of it: the last only belongs unto the office of deacons,‡ and neither of the first is discharged by the institution of it. The care also of the whole work is, as was said, still incumbent on the pastors and elders of the church, only the ordinary execution is committed to the deacons."

This distinguished divine then defines more particu-

* Divine Right, &c., p. 184, 248. The last quotation is from Dr. Owen's work on "The Ruling Elder."

† "Treatise on Church Government," chap. ix. These extracts are long, but they will amply repay the trouble of perusal.

‡ As *peculiar* to it, is evidently meant.

larly, the extent and exercise of this office. "Whereas, the reason of the institution of this office was, in general, to free the pastors of the church who labour in word and doctrine from avocations by outward things, such as wherein the church is concerned: it belongs unto the deacons, not only to take care of and provide for the poor, but to manage all other affairs of the church of the same kind; such as are the providing for the place of the church-assemblies, of the elements for the sacraments, of keeping, collecting and disposing of the stock of the church, for the maintenance of its officers, and incidences, especially in the time of trouble and persecution. Herein are they obliged to attend the elders on all occasions, to perform the duty of the church towards them, and receive directions from them." Again, he asks: "What is the duty of the deacons towards the elders of the churches?" And answers thus: "*Whereas the care of the whole church, in all its concernments, is principally committed unto the pastors, teachers, and elders, it is the duty of the deacons in the discharge of their office—1. To acquaint them from time to time with the state of the church, and especially of the poor, so far as it falls under their inspection. 2. To seek and take their advice in matters of greater importance relating to their office. 3. To be assisting unto them in all the outward concerns of the church.*"

This concludes our review of the principles of the churches, and of distinguished writers, at or near the period of the Reformation, in regard to the exercise of the deacon's office. We find among them a very remarkable unanimity. Indeed, they entirely harmonize in their views. From the latter part of the seventeenth century, it need hardly be observed, darkness begins to settle down upon us on this subject. Within a short time, however, the doctrines of the Reformation have been, by some, recognised and reiterated. *The Reformed Presbyterian Church* in Scotland, has expressed her views very lately with sufficient clearness in the following language, already quoted: "Deacons are ordained upon the choice of the congregation, and are associated with the teaching and ruling-elders in distributing to the necessities of the poor, and managing other temporalities in the church."* *The Associate Presbyterian Church*, in the United States, in her Book of Discipline,† Art. IX., refers to this subject in the following

* "Testimony," edition 1837, chap. xi. § 11. In the following paragraph, it is said, "Rulers meet in presbytery, synod, &c. Each of these courts is a *consistory* of elders."

† Published in 1817. In the revised form of this book, now in over-

terms: "*Deacons are admitted to sit in session when met to consult about the secular affairs of the congregation, and to give their advice, but not to vote in any judicial decision, except in matters relating to their office.*" The same principles substantially are expressed by Dr. M'LEOD. He says of the deacon,* "*his official duty entirely respects temporal affairs.*" And Question 80, "*Is the sole right of managing the pecuniary affairs of the congregation lodged in the deacon's hands?*" he answers as follows: "*The apostles were the primary depositories of power, and after them, teaching elders are competent to the management of ALL ecclesiastical concerns; ruling elders are their helps; and deacons are the helps of both: the apostles and elders had in trust the collections for the poor.*"†

III. In our endeavours to establish the subordination of the deacon to the ruling officers of the church, or, in other words, the right of these rulers to a general superintendence over, or virtual co-operation with the deacon in discharging his functions, we have, thus far, drawn our arguments from the highest sources, the Scriptures, and the footsteps of the flock. The doctrines of the Bible and of the church, respecting the exercise of the deacon's office, are, as we might expect, altogether wise, judicious, and safe. The least reflection will satisfy us, that to remove entirely the management of the fiscal concerns of any society out of the hands of those who have the direction of its other affairs, would be unwise and unsafe. Such an arrangement, any where, would probably terminate by clashing between these independent powers in the same body. For example, the legislature, in a state so constituted,

ture before that body, this is expressed as follows, Art. II. § 15: "*The deacons of a congregation, in conjunction with the session, shall form a consistory, (the pastor presiding,) for the management of the temporalities of the congregation; from whose proceedings, however, an appeal may be taken to the presbytery.*"

* Ecclesiastical Catechism, edition 1831, p. 47.

† The sentiments of this distinguished divine were not mere theory. He was instrumental in introducing *deacons*, and establishing a consistory in his congregation, nearly a quarter of a century ago; where it continued until his death. There is an expression in a note to the Ecclesiastical Catechism, which does not exhibit that correctness which usually characterizes Dr. M'Leod's views on this subject. He says, (p. 130,) "*They (the deacons) are founded upon the circumstance of a class of paupers belonging to the church.*"—This idea has in it something that is even repulsive. Read the narrative, in Acts ii. and iv., of the remarkable liberality of the Christian converts, and say—is this a fair representation of the matter? If so, then the apostles themselves must have been *paupers*—for they were supported out of these contributions.

might legislate, but in every instance where an appropriation was requisite for carrying laws into effect, the will of the legislature *might* be thwarted by the fiscal officers, and rendered ineffectual. Often, unquestionably; would this occur. Consequently, we find no society so constituted. Nations, whatever their form of government, and whatever their character in other respects, never have formed an *imperium in imperio*—a government of this kind within the government. No such arrangement is found any where in churches constituted upon Presbyterian principles, except in reference to the affairs of *congregations*. Churches, considered in their collective capacity, have revenues. These are managed under the direction of the supreme judicatory, Synod, General Synod, or Assembly—and appropriated to the support of theological seminaries, for missionary and education purposes; and, in general, for the accomplishment of such objects as are of public interest and obligation. Sometimes, these revenues are large. Subordinate, or provincial synods and presbyteries, have their distinct funds, which are appropriated under their control and supervision. Now, it may be asked, and it will be hard to find an answer that would satisfy a man of sense, why a principle of so universal application, should not apply to the concerns of the church in a single congregation? If the eldership of a congregation have no voice in secular affairs at home, how do they acquire it in those larger bounds which the presbyterial and synodical limits embrace? If it be right that a synod should take the oversight, in fiscal matters, of what is synodical—and a presbytery, of what is presbyterial—why should not a session of what is congregational? If there is something undignified, or profane, in the funds devoted to religious objects in a congregation, that renders it indelicate for the eldership to touch them, what sanctifies those of a presbytery or synod employed in the same way? The truth is, that, although these revenues are in some respects different, there can be no reason why they should not *all* be managed under the general supervision and control of the eldership.

It will here be asked, and very properly; what guarantee will contributors have, that the funds which they contribute will be judiciously and faithfully applied to the objects contemplated? Happily, this inquiry can be met by more than one satisfactory reply. Indeed, it may be safely affirmed, that no other system furnishes as many, or as strong guarantees for the wise and faithful distribution of the ecclesiastical goods.

In the *first* place, they will be administered by men of the people's own choice. And if the elective franchise is properly exercised, men will be chosen to fill all the offices connected in these affairs, possessing a measure, at least, of the scriptural qualifications. And, unless the state of religion and morals in a congregation be exceedingly low, they will be, at least, *honest* men. And it may be observed that, after all, this is the chief and best guarantee for a faithful administration, either in church or state. In vain will nations form "checks and balances," if they neglect the scriptural direction, and do not set over them "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, and hating covetousness."* And just so, in the churches. The system advocated in this Essay, is that which is most likely to furnish this best of all guarantees. Deacons are chosen by the people, and then, after examination, solemnly sworn, in their ordination vows, to discharge their official duties conscientiously.

In the *second* place, the deacons should render, and may be required to render, a *full* and *certified* account, at suitable intervals, to the congregation, of all their transactions, making as complete a statement as circumstances warrant;† so that their whole doings are known to the church. If any thing has been done wrong, unintentionally, or ignorantly, it may thus, being pointed out in a friendly spirit, be rectified; while serious injustice or mal-administration may be rectified at the stated presbyterial visitation,‡ or even be carried up through the courts according to their regular gradation.

In the *third* place, if the deacons persist in neglect of duty, or in mal-administration, they may be subjected to the censures of the church. And in case suspension, or deprivation of office, becomes necessary, others are chosen at once to fill their place. Their office is inseparably connected with their church-membership; in losing the privileges of the latter, they lose, likewise, the exercise of the former. Thus, while the action of the government and discipline of the church retains even tolerable purity, there is this strong check upon the deacons, and guarantee for the proper execution of the trust committed to them.

* Ex. xviii. 21.

† Some expenditures, it is evident, may be of such a character as to render a public statement of them in a promiscuous assembly, improper. But even in such cases, the deacons should go so far as to certify to the faithful distribution of the church goods.

‡ Such visitations are *essential* to the *proper* working of the Presbyterian system, even in spiritual things.

In the *fourth* place, the deacons are personally liable to the church courts, and the whole board are responsible to the legal tribunals.

These considerations sufficiently establish the fact of the deacon's responsibility. Some would, perhaps, desire a more direct accountability to the church assembled in a congregational assembly. And some, perhaps, would desire the whole responsibility to be to the congregation, as a check upon the ministry and eldership. To these we would say, that the responsibility we advocate, is not only *sufficient*, being a responsibility to the church through her representatives, but has the additional advantage of being entirely harmonious with the whole structure and principles of Presbyterianism; while the opposite views have a strong leaning towards Congregationalism—as they seem to intimate that Presbyterianism requires to rest upon a basis of Congregationalism, to render it equable and firm.

It is not supposed, indeed, that the system developed in our pages, will, in *every instance*, secure a faultless administration. This would be, indeed, Utopian, and fanatical in the present state of human nature. It will not be looked for. Nor is it asserted, that this scriptural system will, in its operation, countervail the difficulties to which the church is subjected, in a state of things where the civil administration is so often in the hands of men, either indifferent or directly opposed to the interests of truth. But, assuredly, so far as any danger may be apprehended from other quarters, where can the property of the church be considered so safe as under the wing of the church herself? Under what circumstances will it be likely to be so well employed in the promotion of the interests of Christ's kingdom, as under the supervision of the church herself? And under what management can we look for so full an effusion of the divine blessing, as in that which is of Christ's appointment?*

* The subordination of the deacon, we have attempted to illustrate and establish, in the *principle* only. As to the manner of applying this principle, or the precise mode of exercising the supervisory power belonging to them, on the part of the eldership, there is something to be said. The old form adopted in the Scottish church, differed somewhat, though not materially, from that in use in the foreign reformed churches. In the latter, the pastor, elders, and deacons met in one body. The elders taking part in *all* that came before them, the deacons advising upon all matters, but voting only in what concerned their own office. In Scotland, the elders met, and it appears that the court was constituted as a court of elders. (See Stewart's Coll.) The deacons were always present, and took part, as in the French churches. Some apply the

CHAPTER V.

CONCLUSION.

Some observations respecting the qualifications, choice, and admission, or ordination of *deacons*, with the objects and results of their official administration in detail, might naturally be expected at this period of our investigations. This Essay has, however, already exceeded the limits originally prescribed to himself by the writer, and these topics, though interesting and important, can receive but a mere passing notice. The deacon should be intelligent, godly, honest, industrious, liberal, zealous, and public spirited;* he is chosen by the people;† the session must then proceed to examine the candidate of the people's choice,‡ and having been sustained, he is to be ordained in the name of the church's Head, and thus set apart to the deacon's office. The church so constituted, having her ministry, whose business it is to "preach the unsearchable riches of Christ,"—her elders, whose special business it is to rule in the house of God, and her deacons, whose special business it is to attend to the promotion of the welfare of the poor, and manage her "outward things," is "furnished with all officers,"§ and thus fully organized and prepared for her work and warfare. She is, then, in all her parts, and in all her operations *formally*, as well as really, subject to Jesus Christ alone, her blessed Head.

principle a little differently. The deacons transact the pecuniary affairs of the congregation, and at stated periods the whole transactions of the board of deacons are laid before a body composed of *all* the officers of the congregation, and called a consistory, to distinguish it from the meetings of the session. This body examines, consults, and determines as to what may be deemed best in reference to those matters which fall under the cognizance of the deacons, until the succeeding meeting. According to this arrangement, as in the Scottish and other reformed churches, the deacon is not a *mere* executive officer, he has a voice in the direction; while, at the same time, the other officers of the congregation exercise a general supervision, and that in the most unexceptionable way in which it appears possible to do it. There is something similar to this in many congregations which have not deacons. As in most of the congregations, at least of the Reformed Church, in Ireland, where the committees appointed to settle the annual accounts make their settlements with the session, and in acknowledged subordination to that body. Many advantages connected with this system might be pointed out, did our limits allow.

* 1 Tim. iii. 8, 9, 12.

† Acts vi. 3.

‡ 1 Tim. iii. 10.

§ Larger Catechism, Ques. 191.

This subject is, in many respects, an important one : too important to be slightly treated, or carelessly examined.* It concerns, intimately, the activity and efficiency of the Christian church in the promotion of the great ends of her organization ; the diffusion of the Gospel in its purity ; and the accomplishment of those works of charity and benevolence, by which she is to reflect before the world, and upon it, the image of the grace and compassion of her beneficent Redeemer. The church should act with freedom, consistency, and power, in fulfilling her high and exalted mission. Why entangle her with bonds which bind her to the world ? Why impair her energies by the crippling influence of humanly devised modes of managing her pecuniary interests, when we have in the institutions of Christ a wise, consistent, and efficient system ? A system that falls in, in every part, with the orderly, compact, and vigorous structure of Presbyterian church-government. It was, moreover, the system received and practised by the reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Let the churches return to this "good old way," laying aside all the substitutes that have been devised for the office of deacon, and then *one* obstacle to the spread of truth will be removed. Not, indeed, the *only* one. Far from it. Yet accomplish this, and it is something gained — some progress made in a better conformity to the doctrines and precepts of the Bible. May that time soon come when all "shall see eye to eye;" when every corruption shall be purged out, and the church redeemed by the blood of Christ, be made altogether glorious, "with His comeliness put upon her."

* It should be remembered that this subject was considered important enough by Knox and Melville, and other noble reformers, in Scotland, to be contended for, for more than thirty years, (from 1560 to 1592,) against the power of the court of that kingdom. Especially was it argued vehemently from 1578 to 1592, fourteen years.

A P P E N D I X.

NOTE A.—P. 17.

'The discontinuance of the office of the deacon in the Scottish churches, and those which have derived their system of doctrine and order from them, is a subject of inquiry which possesses both an historical and a practical interest at the present time. The Act Recissory, in 1661, broke down at once most of the fabric which had been erected during the Second Reformation. It left, however, the congregations in possession of their organization, until further acts of legislation, and deeds of violence, destroyed in many districts, even this part of the Presbyterian structure. This was particularly the case among those who faithfully resisted seduction, as well as violence; and refusing to accept of any *indulgence*, were driven into the mountains and caves, by the dragoons of Dalziel and Claverhouse. After the Revolution settlement, in 1688, when William and Mary were called to the throne, and Presbyterianism re-established, (but not upon pure scriptural principles,) deacons existed for a short time in the Scottish Establishment. It appears, that this office had been, at least partially, neglected before the year 1719; for in that year an act of assembly required "ministers to take care that deacons, as well as elders, be ordained in congregations where deacons are wanted." This law was ineffectual. The causes which had led to the previous neglect, still continued to operate; and that, too powerfully for legislative enactments to counteract. Not very long after that period, deacons were not generally found in the congregations of that establishment. This accounts for the want of this class of officers in those denominations which derive their origin from that church, since the period when she ceased to have deacons.

As to the causes of this. The chief was, unquestionably, *the transferring to other hands the deacon's duties*. The charge of providing and erecting places of worship; of furnishing funds to the ministry of the church for their support, and, in some measure, of providing for the poor, was given into the hands of civil officers. It was in vain to expect the *office* of deacon to be kept in the church by laws, when the *duties of the office* were almost entirely discharged by civil officers. The few that remained to the deacon were afterwards quietly appropriated by the session; and then the deacon, as a necessary consequence, dropped out of the church's organization.

As to the Covenanters, who dissented from the Revolution Settlement, it is not difficult to ascertain why this office should have disappeared from among them also. While the persecution raged, it was impossible to preserve their perfect organization. Whether the deacons, which James Renwick in a letter to Sir Robert Hamilton, says he "was about to ordain," were ever actually ordained, or not, is uncertain. His speedy martyrdom probably prevented it. After the year 1688, their "Societies" were left *eighteen* years without a minister. Of course, no ordinations took place during that period among them, either of elders, or of deacons. They were, literally, "like sheep without a shepherd." This was their state for many years after the constitution of a presbytery. They could scarcely be said to have *congregations*; they were rather *missionary stations*, dispersed here and there. A full and regular organization could hardly be looked for. Moreover, it ought to be remembered, that before the period when their congregations had become compacted, the churches around them had dropped the deacon's office. There was, consequently, nothing in their circumstances, to recall this office. Other plans had gradually grown up for the accomplishment of the objects contemplated in its institution. It is a ground of rejoicing that the Scottish churches are, generally, awaking to the consideration of this subject.

The observations just made, apply with equal truth to the same denomina-

tion in Ireland. It is not more than one generation since most of the congregations of the Reformed Presbyterian Church there, have passed from the condition of missionary stations. While a church exists in so scattered a state, the want of deacons is not sensibly felt, and passes unobserved.

NOTE B.—P. 28.

The following list of texts in the Old Testament, which relate to the ecclesiastical finances, has been prepared with some care. Passages referring to private pecuniary concerns, are not given. The list contains, it is believed, all the texts in which mention is made of any arrangement respecting the public fund of the church.

Lev. v., trespass money to be given to Aaron and his sons.

Lev. xxvii., laws regarding dedicated things.

Num. iii. 46—51, directs the redemption-money of the first-born to be given to Aaron and his sons.

“ iv. chapter throughout, directs the distribution of the “charge of the tabernacle,” among the families of Kohath, Gershon, and Merari.

“ xviii., the provision made for the maintenance of the priests and Levites, was all to be “devoted,” and under their charge.

“ xxxi. 26—54, a prescribed portion of the spoils of the Midianites to be brought to “Eleazar the priest,” v. 29, 31, 41, 51, 54, and given to “the Levites,” ver. 30, 47.

2 Kings xii., the priests were ordered by Jehoash to repair the temple. They were negligent, and the king and Jehoiada took the matter into their own hands. An extraordinary case.

“ xxii. 4—7, the high-priest to take charge of the funds to repair the temple, in Josiah’s reign.

1 Chron. ix. 26, certain Levites were over the “treasuries of the house of God.”

“ xxiii. 28—32, the whole charge of “the tabernacle—of the holy things—of Aaron and his sons,” assigned to the Levites.

“ xxvi. 25—28, Levites had “charge over all the treasures of the dedicated things.”

“ xxix. 8, all the treasures devoted to the building of the temple, put into “the treasure of the house of the Lord, by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite.”

2 Chron. viii. 15, the same order was observed during Solomon’s reign, concerning the treasures.

“ xxiv. 5—14, the repair of the temple, as in 2 Kings xii.

“ xxxi. 11—19, the treasures of the dedicated things were put into the hands of the Levites, v. 14, “to distribute the oblations of the Lord, and the most holy things;” v. 15, “to give to their brethren by courses, as well to the great as to the small;” v. 19, “to give portions to all the males among the priests, and to all that were reckoned by genealogies among the Levites.” The latter were “The sons of Aaron the priest.”

“ xxxiv. 10—19, the same as 2 Kings xxii.

Neh. x. 37—39, and xiii. 13, tithes, &c., given to the Levites. The “priest was to be with the Levites, when the Levites took tithes.”

“ xii. 44, 47, the holy things given to the Levites, who gave them to the sons of Aaron.

These are the principal texts, if not all, from which we can gather any information concerning the fiscal administration of the Old Testament church. One principle pervades the whole. *The property dedicated to ecclesiastical purposes, was always committed for safe keeping and distribution, to the Levites, or priests; all of whom were ordained officers.*

Besides, there was a distinct state-treasury, under civil control. 1 Chron. xxvii. 24—31.

NOTE C.—P. 54.

The question respecting the title to church property; that is, in whom it should vest, is connected with the subject of our investigations: and deserves

some notice. There is great diversity of practice on this subject among the churches. Some have incorporated boards of trustees, others, incorporated consistories; some, unincorporated boards of trustees, or deacons; some vest their property in private individuals, *in trust*. This diversity of practice shows the entire want of fixed principles, in regard to this whole subject in the churches. An inquiry of this kind could not arise in a nation truly reformed, and doing its duty in reference to the church. At present, there can be very satisfactory reasons given why the title should be vested in the officers of the congregation:

1. They are its natural representatives.
2. They and their successors will remain while there is an organized congregation.
3. In their hands it is less likely to be used in any way injurious to the congregation.

These considerations show both the equity and propriety of the title so vesting. However held, it is of course understood, that the whole is *a trust* in law, and cannot, without moral and legal guilt, be perverted from the ends for which it was contributed.

ERRATUM.

Page 28, foot-note “†,” before “chap. xxvi.,” insert “1 Chron.”

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

The Deacon a Standing Church Officer.

Argument from the Scriptures,	5
Deacons in the early Christian Church,	9
Opinions on the subject,	10
Deacons in the Reformed churches,	13
Expressions of opinion, since the Reformation,	19

CHAPTER II.

The Nature of the Deacon's Office.

The care of the Poor belongs to the Deacon,	22
The management of the Finances generally,	24
Argument from Acts vi. 1—6,	24
Views of commentators on this passage,	26
Argument from the Old Testament,	28
Argument from the Jewish Synagogue,	30
Doctrines and practice of the Church in the primitive times,	31
Doctrines and practice of the Church in the times of the Reformation,	31
Opinions of late writers,	36
Doctrines of Presbyterian churches,	37
Objections considered,	38

CHAPTER III.

Of the Substitutes for the Deacon.

Various substitutes specified,	40
Boards of trustees are an innovation,	42
Boards of trustees are unscriptural,	44
Boards of trustees are anti-scriptural,	46
Boards of trustees are of dangerous tendency,	49
Boards of trustees are unsafe,	53

CHAPTER IV.

The Relations of the Deacon.

THE DEACON IS SUBORDINATE TO THE ECCLESIASTICAL COURTS.

Scripture argument,	55
The practice of the Christian Church,	60
Illustration of this subject from the structure of society,	67
This mode of managing church property is safe,	68

CHAPTER V.

CONCLUSION,	71
APPENDIX,	73





DATE DUE



